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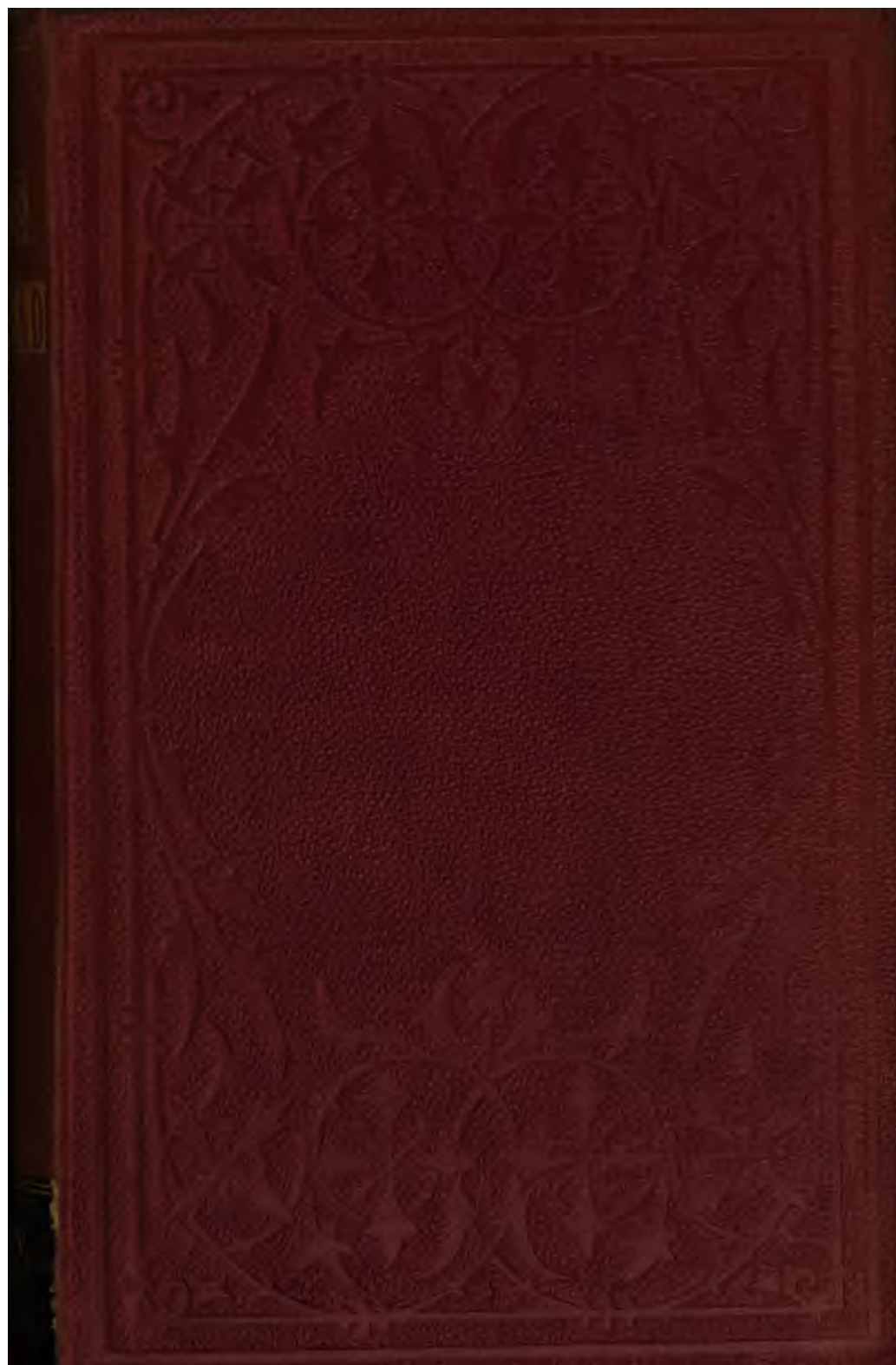
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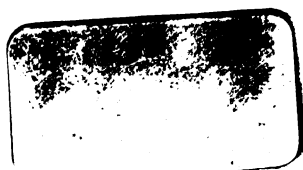








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# THE RECTOR'S HOMESTEAD.

A SIMPLE STORY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

"Love is Heaven, and Heaven is Love."

OLD SONG.

VOL. II.



London :

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,  
30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE,  
1868.

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# THE RECTOR'S HOMESTEAD.

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## CHAPTER I.

"WELL, girls," said the Rector, on his return home, "have you settled which of the twain is to go to India?"

"No," they replied. "We are a trifle mortified to think that the Captain was so full of praise for his aunt, that he never gave us a chance in any way. We felt quite *hors de combat*, whilst all those soft words were flying round us."

"And yet," continued Fanny, "I have an idea, that with all Captain Lethbridge's outward parade and foppery, and that eternal smoothing of his moustache, he is homely and domestic in his



desires and wishes, and that in a quiet way he has quite formed his opinions concerning us."

"I suspect he likes you best," said Minnie, "for though he talked the most to me, yet I saw him staring at you whilst you were looking at those prints. I think he is of an obstinate sort of nature, that would just like the wrong person."

"But I do not see, Minnie, why you are to carry off all the *beaux* in the county," said her father, "leaving my little demure Fanny, to go a begging."

"It is always the way with Minnie," replied Fanny, good humouredly. "She thinks I am to live single, and sigh for a rector in my old age, in the way of Miss Lethbridge."

"If you are half as dear a little body you will do very well," said her uncle. "I am not surprised that I should have admired her thirty years ago; my wonder is at our continued pride and obstinacy in keeping up the estrangement; those gentle manners, those bewitching ways, that cap-



tivating laugh, coming from a peculiarly musical throat, bring one pleasantly back to days gone by; we will ask the nephew to dine here some day, and perhaps, his aunt might be tempted to come with him; I even fancy that he will improve on acquaintance. He is uncommonly like what Tom — his father — was at his age, and he even reminds me of old Sugar-plum, the grocer. Ah! well, he has been dead long ago, and our business is to forget this leap down in his escutcheon. It might have taught me not to throw stones at my friend's glass houses, for it cost me both my friend and my dear little sweetheart."

The acquaintance once made, the cousins expected that the Captain would be glad to wear away a little of his time—the long day he talked of—by idling and amusing himself at the Rectory. But no, the creature still made himself scarce, and they began to suspect that he must have heard of the old feud between his father and the Rector. This, however, was not the case; if it had been told him, he would only have laughed at it; he



was like all men fresh from India, who have spent their bright opening years only in the company of their brother officers; he was wild for female society, yet too shy, too little self-assured to enter upon it. In short, with all his bold and audacious tone of manner, women—English women—were too superlative for him; he must acclimatise himself, ere he put himself in their power; the refinement of their dress, their very smile daunted him, the booming guns of a field of battle seemed to him less appalling than the rustle of their silks. He was perfectly aware himself that he had come home to marry, and so he did not like the little quiz, the delicate spirit of chaffing that was got up whenever he mixed with the opposite gender; it seemed to take off the bloom of his reserved affections, it was roughly done, he must silently walk into the heart of the woman who was to love him, and none but herself be a bit the wiser.

So his delight was to seclude himself in his aunt's garden, and he felt that if marriages were



made in heaven, so would his tender partner for life assuredly walk in. He frequented the parsley beds, and dived into the deepest shades ; still his usual promenade was a high terrace walk, a sort of quarter deck, and here he paced up and down, smoking away his pipes, and revelling in the bright pictures and promises of his own imagination.

And he looked very noble in his morning's *dishabille* and quite unconscious of one or two pairs of bright eyes that had unexpectedly caught a glimpse of him from a high gable-end window of a house near, and whose great pleasure it was from this bird's eye distant view, to watch his movements. And they saw that when the letter carrier arrived at the gate, the Captain himself would fly to open it ; and he seemed to know the man's tread, and to be near at hand when the hour came. The "Times" paper he knew would not disappoint him ; this arrival was an every day fact, as regular as the royal mail itself. But sometimes it happened that letters of apparent





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of the cigar, and the postman even had to ring twice, ere he was attended to. And then, whilst he was thus occupied, his aunt joined him ; and placing her little hand through his arm, said,

“ Freddy, my dear boy, you are younger than I am, and your back is stronger. I wonder if you could come and dig some early potatoes, the cook is busy, and the gardener nowhere to be found. Come along with me, and let us see what we can do.”

The Captain was charmed to be made useful ; and it was quite a picture to see him walk off, the spade over his shoulder, a basket in his hand, and the little aunt toddling after, pointing out to him shrubs that her brother Tom had planted, and showing him big trees which were little dwarf things when he, Fred, was a boy.

And then she said,

“ Do you know, my dear, you are a great comfort to me. And it makes me low spirited to think what I shall do without you ? But that time is



not yet come; and I do hope you will give me some trouble, ere your furlough expires, so that I might be glad to get rid of you. It is hard to part with anything we love." They had handed over the potatoes to the cook maid, and the aunt had linked her arm in her nephew's, and as they walked up and down the terrace walk, she said, "I sometimes fancy you must find it dull, Fred, but when you see more of my old friend, the Rector, and his amiable girls, you will manage to fill up your time more to your satisfaction; they are both charming girls, as how should they be otherwise, with such a man for their father."

"I thought one was the niece?" carelessly observed the Captain, "though which was the daughter and which the niece, I cannot exactly tell you."

"Stupid boy," replied Miss Lethbridge, "and I fancying all the time you were on your preferment. But, Fred, let us understand each other. I have not much to leave you at my death; but all I have is yours; this house, the furniture, and



my plate, and I have, *entre nous*—which means between you and I—more of that than I care to show; so do not fail to tell me, when you really fall in with the ‘Miss Suitable’ of your choice. I have collected one way and the other, many useful and pretty things that it would take me some time to enumerate. For instance, there is this little ring, and which I should wish to be buried with me, but this turquoise and this pearl, you must keep for some younger hand than mine, it will be sure to fit the lady you may love, and if I am pleased with her, she shall wear my rich point lace and other ornaments. Indeed, Fred, she shall wear them at any rate, for if you are satisfied with your choice, surely I must be pleased also; still do not hurry, my dear Fred, in such a serious matter. There is plenty of time, and whilst single you are always on the safe side of matrimony.” The good aunt, as she left him, returned him his book, opening it at the place where she had interrupted him.

Still the whisper was, that the handsome Cap-



tain did want a wife, and more than this, that he had come all the way from India to get one ; and that when his legs scoured the country round in accomplishing new walks, his eyes glanced over the hedges, and his heart bounded up the hills in quest of a counter heart to fill that heart's fond yearnings.

His aunt was all very well, he loved her as a most dutiful nephew should love such a kind little relative, an aunt among a thousand. But the affectionate nature of Frederick Lethbridge was born, he knew full well, to find his counterpart—his Eve—in the earthly paradise of this world. Surely there was some fair creature destined to be the object of his love, ordained in the archives of Heaven to be his own, to be wooed and won.

But who was it to be ? Did he like Minnie Lonsdale ? Did he admire Fanny Ashmore ? Was he to content himself with one of the belles of Stoke, or, in the manner of another Colebs, search the country round in quest of a wife.



After dinner, his aunt seemed to think he felt more inclined to be dull and moody, than at any other part of the day; and she asked him, "did he miss his brother officers, and the cheerful mess of his regiment?"

He answered, "No."

"Would he like her to give a large party, to rub up the best part of her acquaintance, and to invite some of the county families to come and enliven him?"

He replied, "No."

And she made the lounging chair more comfortable, putting up the cushion, and then kissing his fine forehead, glad to see him reposing in peace, she asked,

"Is it a wife, my dear Fred, you want? Is it one to share the sorrows as well as the joys of life's chequered career?"

He held the soft hand for a moment, as it passed kindly over his cheek, and affirmed, seriously and steadily, it was.

And the morning song seemed much in unison



love troubles his troubles. Still, he went far enough, ere he found a partner to his choice."

"And might have met with her some few miles from here. These things are very strange, and does it not prove that there is a fatality in matrimony? It was decided they were to meet; and so she accepted her sister's invitation to India. But why did not you marry the Rector, my little auntie? You had not so far to go."

"No, I had not; but my brother Tom, your father, set his face as a flint against it; and when he had once taken up an idea, he was not to be talked out of it. I was then in the hey-day of my bloom, for youth has a charm in itself; and I was courted and made a fuss about. And your father thought—and with some probability—that I might do much better than to link my fate with that of a poor curate; for the old Rector was alive then, and likely to do well for many years. So it really was but a poor prospect. Poor Tom! I think he acted for the best, as far



as our finite wisdom can know what really is for the best. And then a misunderstanding sprung up between the two young men; and then they did not speak; and then I did not speak. And then the curate married a girl with a little money; and then his father died, and he became the rector; and then I saw that we had been wrong, and that not having married my heart's first choice, my desire was to *bowde* over it, and to live single. And I used, indeed, to murmur over the days gone by, forgetting that these blights upon our prospects—these seeming obstacles—are ordained by a wisdom which cannot err. The 'ifs' of man are the decrees of an over-ruling Providence. It is just that 'if' on which our fate turns; and if I had married the Rector, perhaps I should not have been so happy as I am now."

"I doubt it, my dear aunt; your delight is to make others happy; so in that way you could not have had too much to do. What are the two girls like?" he asked, carelessly.



"Why, Fred, you have seen them; Minnie Lonsdale and Fanny Ashmore."

He laughed and replied,

"Yes, well you may say I have seen them; and I wish I could add that I had heard them. Good gracious! do all English girls mince themselves up in this awkward sort of manner. They seemed to take me for a regular Fe-faw-fum, and positively looked afraid of me. I cannot say I saw much in them to admire. But then I am odd in my taste. I like graceful people, with dark hair; and I have a strong objection to low foreheads and short noses. And then it is always the opposite to ourselves that we love. A tall man likes a short wife; a great talker likes a silent woman; a gay fellow, a domestic creature, that he can leave at home; a stupid booby takes to a spit-fire shrew; a clever man, your regular out-and-out scholar, pairs off with one who dare nots ay bo! to a goose, much more to her husband. A clever French statesman once said,



that if he could have found a wife *plus nulle* than the very one he had chosen, he would have taken her in preference."

Miss Lethbridge seemed much amused by her nephew's animated description, and added,

"If love is the result of contrast, Fred, we shall see you with a little doll of a wife, with blue eyes, flaxen hair, and a virago in spirit; one who will rule you with the very glimpse of her knitting pins. I shall laugh very much, Fred, to see you kept in subjection by your wife."

"Then she must be a sharper little woman than you are, my auntie. Dear little thing! she must take the tip top of the morning ere she gets the better of me; and will soon wish she had never been born, if she does not submit to my rule and guidance. With these prognostics, dear aunt, it seems lucky there are no pretty girls in this out-of-the-way place to mislead one's judgment; for beauty is something more than skin deep; the beautiful is even higher than the good; for it is all that good, and something be-



sides. A face that really pleases, must always please; and if one is pleased, surely that is enough."

"Choose but with discretion, Fred, and I shall be pleased."

"Well, then, suppose you ask the Rector here again, and bid him bring his daughters; they are demure enough to satisfy your taste, and to stimulate my curiosity. There seems more in the Rector than them both put together. I fancy in the little one, Fanny, there might be something of fun, if her *mauvaise honte* would only let her assert herself. But, poor girls! shut up in that old thatched barn of a place; what can you expect? It is a pity the Rector does not give them some advantages."

"And so force them to despise the old barn, as you call it. They are good girls, Fred, and that is better than fashion; besides, I do not see that they are deficient."

"But why do they keep themselves so much at home? You may hunt the country round, and



never meet them. When I called the other day, I daresay they were peeping behind some blind, whilst the servant said not at home. I do so hate hum-drums ! Please, my dear aunt, do not expect me to marry a hum-drum !”

“Silly boy!” was all she said ; but she wished in her heart he would marry one even half as good as either Minnie or Fanny.



## CHAPTER II.

MINNIE and Fanny were neither of them suited to take a lover by storm; there was nothing in them of that flippant mode of attack, that proclaims at once that the heart is on the *pavé*. The forming an acquaintance was—with them—a steady and stipulated matter of form; they required time to look round, and to establish their own conclusions, ere they could advance a step; and so the captain was kept for a season *de haut en bas*, without meaning him any disrespect. Could he but have seen them domesticated, and rejoicing in the refined and quiet happiness of



those Rectory walls, how different would have been his estimate! There he would have found them taking their active part in the home and village duties, happy themselves, and making the happiness of those around, busy workers both in body and mind, labourers in the vineyard of life, yet passing that life in calm and peaceful contentment—the sun and light of that dear old homestead.

It is not likely that the Captain should have known all this; neither was it likely, with all his sagacity, that he should suspect that neither of the girls had a heart to give him. With his simple and frank confidence, he thought that they would—if not exactly jump at him—yet be proud to love him. He saw nothing to dispute their affection, for he always classed them together; he knew his own heart was free, and he wished for nothing better than to make his selection. It seemed to him so strange, after the suddenness of Indian arrangements, that he was not already engaged either to one or other of them. He had



seen no *beaux* in the place, saving the curate, and the staid old Unitarian.

So these girls were plainly ready for his advance. He counted the months on his fingers, ere his furlough would cease. There was yet plenty of time, and he had not the slightest inclination to hurry himself. Oh! how he loved the freedom of nothing to do, to roam over the Devonshire hills, to rush up here and down there, to know that his mind was made up to marry, and that his dear little wife was somewhere. She was in the very air he breathed. And then he would say to himself,

"To love thee was the easiest task  
Affection ever taught me!"

And then he would almost wish himself poetical, but he was staunch and determined—he settled, and that was better.

Still, whilst he was thus dreaming in the clouds, as it were, the affairs of the nether world were progressing; night succeeded to day, and day to



night; and there was no waiting for his arrangement or selection.

The Rectory party were at breakfast one morning, when Mr. Carsfield was unexpectedly announced. The Rector took all things quietly, and, as a matter of course, Minnie wished the tea had been stronger, as their visitor carelessly accepted a cup from her hands.

Fanny was on the *qui vive* to know why Mr. Carsfield should have come thus early; but the enjoyment of the cream and the brown bread seemed to him quite a sufficient reason to find himself domiciliated thus quietly among them.

Minnie was looking very pretty that morning, and she felt cheerful and happy in the pleasure of his society. It put no constraint upon her; she cut the bread and butter for her sisters, and went round with the jug of hot milk, just the same as though they had been alone. And really occupied with these tender cares, Carsfield watched her even with more than his usual interest; and he asked her abruptly, "What was the secret of



her tranquil happiness? what principle, what rule she went by, that he might himself follow her mode of felicity." He was answered by a look that said more than words. Her soft, brown eyes glanced over the happy little home circle, and after a pause she said—

"How can it be otherwise?"

This was all very well; but Carsfield wanted her to say more than this. There seemed to have latterly been too long a silence between them; and she appeared, in a measure, to have given him up. And this was by no means what he either hoped or intended. He felt that whatever he did she was ever uppermost in his thoughts; and seeing her as he now saw her, he was determined to sift the matter, and to reflect upon the subject on which they differed more, than he had hitherto done.

The great concern of his life was the search for goodness and for truth. Here it seemed to be in full being; and yet there was a struggle in his soul as he looked on this home rest, a cogitation



going on in his innermost mind, the why that he and the mild, the spotless Minnie should be so near, and yet so far apart. His was a friendship not of yesterday, but one which years had matured. And his love, what was that? Neither fitful, transient, nor vacillating. "Yes," he added to himself, warmed with his mental soliloquising, "my love is pure, constant, and without one shadow of turning." And yet he felt that he was merely tolerated, and this by a penniless girl. Surely his wealth, his well standing in the county, might be something in the balance! Then, where was the objection? A bright smile passed over his countenance as he quietly to himself answered the question.

"I will propose to her," he settled, "and I will hear what she has to say. Oh! my Minnie!" he added, as he watched her busy with her morning duties. "Why this religious disagreement? this difference of creed, looking as we both do to the All Powerful One, and worshipping Him the same, both in the spirit and in truth? Why



should not my warm, my honest affection be requited?"

But Minnie had much to occupy her at this early time of day, and she was almost sorry to see that every one had glided off, leaving it to her to do the gracious by Mr. Carsfield. But there was a newspaper near, "and the new magazines," she said; "and papa will be so glad to see you in his study."

"Will he, Minnie? but that is not the object of my visit. I came only that I might find you alone. I want to have a little quiet talk with you."

And as he spoke he took her hand, and gently drew her towards him. She looked timid, and he assured her by saying—

"For a few moments—a very few moments, Minnie; we will not trouble you with one word of what we have so often canvassed. Let it be understood that yours is ever the Protestant motto—*Je le maintiendrai*—and I will not coerce you or limit you in a single duty. Let us under-



stand each other, Minnie; let us speak clear of religious hindrances, for it is only in religion that I think we differ. Do not then let it separate us. My heart, you know, is yours; you must know it, Minnie, and my purport in being at the Rectory thus early this morning is to offer you my hand and fortune. I am tired of waiting for opportunities. Such an errand is surely a business in itself; so tell me, Minnie, and in the self same spirit that actuates me, will you accept me as your husband?"

He had spoken very quick, and with some agitation, but here he paused, and then added—

"Let us at the same time thoroughly understand each other. I see your goodness, your perfection in all things, and you will respect my short-comings. Tell me, my gentle Minnie, you accept me, and on these conditions."

There was a silence, and Minnie's cheek paled, and there was a little wring of her hands, as if some despair had possessed her; but she looked at Carsfield, steadily, and a tear dimmed the



brightness of her eye, as she replied calmly, and decidedly—

“ No, Mr. Carsfield, no. Don’t deceive yourself, and don’t let me deceive you ; neither must you be offended with my frankness. It is simply wise to tell you I cannot be your wife under existing circumstances.”

He looked more vexed than surprised, and said, quietly—

“ But think, Minnie—think well, ere you decide. You are young and inexperienced, and may need a faithful adviser ; think well of all I have to give you—house and land, and a life of ease and luxury.”

There was somewhat of the pride of the young martyr as she repeated—

“ No, Mr. Carsfield, no.”

But when he said, “ And your father, Minnie, placed, through your means, in easy and happy circumstances,” the tears stood in her eyes ; but again she could only say—

“ No, Mr. Carsfield, no.”



He drew her gently towards him, and pressed her to his heart, uttering, with deep earnestness—

“Good, dear, little Minnie, do not be so obdurate; but think ere you cast me from you. Keep me not in suspense, but say for once and for all you will be mine.”

“No, indeed, no,” she repeated, with an hysterical sob; “I can say nothing but this—it must be one creed, one heart, one faith. With all my feelings of esteem for you, you know too well that indeed—indeed I cannot marry you.”

The next moment he was left alone in the apartment.



## CHAPTER III.

THE course of true love never did run smooth; the course of *no* love ever did run smooth; with its first dart anxiety and restlessness begin. And peace, what becomes of peace? we look around, we ask where it is?—where? we piteously demand, and echo mildly replies—where?

It was a staggering point to Minnie that she should have dismissed Mr. Carsfield as a suitor; and it had all passed in so brief a space of time; it was come and gone all in a moment—the fate of a life dealt off, as it were, with a heigh presto of the cards! She thought he would have talked the point over with her, and she could not have



supposed he would have taken her dismissal in so few words. Her dismissal, indeed! What was the good of dismissing a man who was thus, in spite of her best efforts, ever haunting her recollection?

So, with the secret at her heart of what she had done, and feeling desolate and alone in thus, and, perhaps, with too much scrupulousness, giving up what was hers, she sought, in her domestic circle, to busy her mind.

Fanny looked at her with an expression that said, "What's the matter?" but her intent was to shew that nothing was the matter; it had all been a wrestle with her better feelings — the victory was gained; in her weakness it felt almost like defeat—still, it was gained, for she had, with no reservation, declined Mr. Carsfield's proposal.

And what seemed so strange to her, under all the turmoil of her own breast, the expectation of seeing him, and the disappointment that she did not, that the world went on calmly as before, no



volcanoes, no thunder-storm ; the captain even might have made himself useful in diverting the time. The heart is so often caught at the rebound that she almost looked round to see where hers might pitch. She was not proud of her present choice, and in her simplicity she thought if she could amalgamate her feelings with what would do her credit, there would be no harm done.

Village maidens do not look on love, or rather choice, as the damsels of the world. There are the goods ; a young man wanting a wife : does it suit—yes or no ? The worldling knows that the odds are against her getting what she might like ; with those who meet in the world there is nothing of compromise—it is hit or miss—luck is all. The pastoral sounds all very pretty—Colin and Phœbe meeting at the stile ; but we suspect it all comes to the same thing—the heart will be pleased, or love, theory, and practice all come to nothing.

In due time Minnie again took up her interest



with the world. She found that her own secret was safe; neither her father nor her cousin suspected for a moment what had occurred; and this gave her a freedom from constraint. So she listened with the rest, to the tattle of the village, and the *on dit* was that the creature—the cynosure for wandering eyes—had become very intimate at the curate's. The explanation was also at hand, and went from mouth to mouth—he was engaged to his friend's cousin, Miss Lucy Paton. It was not unlikely to those who deal in the marvellous. She had hinted at her expectation of meeting him at Lord Marchmont's, and there was no accounting for taste.

Fanny laughed at the idea—a pleased laugh—and remarked quietly she had rather it were him than Mr. Bramley, adding that she could better spare a better man, to get rid of the nuisance of having Miss Lucy in their immediate vicinity.

Minnie did not for a moment believe a word of the report, maintaining that there was too great a disparity—the Captain was in the hey-day of



his youth, Miss Lucy decidedly on the wane. If money were his object she could only wish him well through it, and admit that she was disappointed in her estimate of his character altogether.

Be this as it may, Frederick Lethbridge was constantly to be seen on his way to the curate's dwelling. He had found a companion, if not exactly a kindred soul. He liked Bramley, he thought him a good fellow, kind to the poor, and no humbug. Whilst he himself was grumbling over his pay, finding it not half enough for his own consumption, there was Bramley giving the half of the modicum he had to the poor, and feeling himself none the worse off for so doing. It was a new school for the Captain. He had heard of charity, read of charity, and his heart was disposed for charity, but he had hitherto no idea in the world how to do it. Now he saw the channel in which a little assistance could effect a great deal of good ; " inasmuch as you give it unto one of these," and with many apologies he added his



mite, hardly fancying what such as he could spare would be acceptable to anyone. He confessed he did not understand the poor, he thought them an independant clique, and he felt it somewhat a breach of politeness to burst into their cottages under the plea of doing them service. How many a house he would gladly have burst into with the same guarantee? Still, where Bramley's routine of morning's walk led him, there was he also, suggesting many little rules of etiquette that Bramley pooh poohed him out of.

"But, my dear fellow, you surely do not mean to go into that tidy little white cottage unasked. Suppose the people are engaged and do not want you, what will you say then?"

"Come along," said Bramley, "with a good intent one need have no scruples."

And the Captain generally did as he was bid.

One day he said—

"I could almost fancy, Bramley, that you and I had been years together in India, marching and



countermarching, routing out the sepoye as you ferret your cottagers."

And so these two allies were ever to be seen trudging along together. Early in the morning the Captain would ascend the sharp-pointed hill which led to the Curate's dwelling, neither caring for the sea mists, nor hindered by the usual Devonshire drizzle. Then a few hard words at the oddity of the latch on the rustic gate, that in the opening and shutting would neither do one thing or the other. Then, with one stride up the garden walk, he gained the rustic porch, tapping against the door with the handle of his whip, a kind word to the Skye-terrier, and a sharp "s-sca-at" to the cat, hitting the embers from his cigar, and then with one roll he was in the easy chair and laughing at his friend to see, by the books scattered over his writing table, the helps he was gaining for his sermon.

"Very good ! very effective !" he said ; "Til-lotson, I presume ?"



"You impudent dog."

"His own. What, eh? Never mind, Bramley, I will not peach. Write on, my boy, just what comes first, and make a speedy ending."

There was something very snug in that cloud-capped bachelor's residence; comfort was there, without any display whatever. The table squaring every other way but with the walls; the breakfast still left, showing of good brown bread, and rich yellow, butter-cup butter. The master's boots seemed to have walked into the room, standing in the first position, and demurely waiting by the presentable coat, hung over the back of a chair, the newspapers lying on the ground. Sputter, sputter, sputter, went the pen, and the Captain was left to a quiet reconnoitre.

"I say, Bramley," he said, whilst approvingly glancing around, "by Jove! how comfortable you are up here. I almost wish I were a curate in old England, rather than have to brave all the ups and downs of India again, even with the compensate prospect of being an old yellow nugget of



a colonel at the end. I say, what chimneys are those peeping up through the trees? Not surely the Rectory so near? By the way, what sort of girls are the two young ladies? Why cannot I turp Rector, and take it all of a lump?"

"It would indeed be to you a lump of this world's good things. And the girls? Oh! surely looking at your handsome face, they would be only too glad to fall into your views. I should be the loser in every sense of the word, for I suspect it is little you would do in the parochial line. Still, I am safe; your vanity will never consent to the tonsure, even to be Pope of Rome. Like a cat with its own tail, you would lack amusement, without your moustache."

"Still, I fancy you will soon see moustache in the pulpit as well as beards; there is, in short, no telling what we shall not see. At any rate, I shall wait for the turn of events."

And here he gave the handsome pair he wore an extra curl.

"But the two girls, Bramley: do tell me what



they are in themselves ; it saves a fellow so much trouble. Are they jolly girls, or of the milk and water sort ?”

“They are,” replied Bramley, “everything that need be desired in the feminine line,” adding, with mock gravity, “good as pretty, and pretty as good. But really and truly, Miss Lonsdale is excellent in every respect, whilst Fanny, the cousin—it is too silly to think of—yet whilst, I confess I am desperately in love with Miss Minnie, I cannot but fancy that Miss Fanny has set her heart on me. And this is awkward, as I cannot return the compliment.”

“Nonsense ! awkward !” said the Captain, in a high state of excitement. “Why not go slap up to the Rectory—down rather—and propose to them both ? Do it at once. Why, man, delay is death to your prospects. Just think of the living ; of course it goes with the girls. And should the Rector drop ere you make up your cards why, you are floored at once.”

“I am floored,” he said.



And the Curate rose hastily from his seat, and he tramped across the room, as though by that quick step he was somewhat nearer the mark. The blind went up with a flip, showing to more advantage the rich church land that lay beneath the hill ; and he looked serious as he said,

“ No, Lethbridge ; fertile as it is, it is not the land I want. True love is very disinterested, and I think, with a little encouragement, mine would be that love of which no man need be ashamed, for Miss Minnie—”

“ And Miss Fanny ?”

“ Oh ! she may go with the living for what I care.”

“ Or to Hong Kong, eh ? But let us have a little confessional confidence. You like Miss Minnie, and she likes you ?”

“ *Mea culpa mea maxima culpa*, to the first charge.”

“ What the Hong Kong business ?”

“ No ; how absurd you are ! I mean seriously that I do esteem Miss Minnie, but I have my



fears that her affections are engaged, and that her heart is not at her disposal. She loves, or I am mistaken, a person of the name of Carsfield, and although he is a worthy—good man, I fear an attachment in that quarter must prove detrimental to her own happiness. He is a Socinian, and the Rector is, I think, much to blame in having thrown them so much together. The Rector is a sanguine old man, and depending on the luck of leisure, thinks all will go well, living and all, to the end. To my mind, it would be wiser to make some arrangement for his children.”

“And yet you walk over the course. At any rate, don’t give up, my friend. Despair is an evil counsellor. I will stand by you; I will back you, Bramley, to the end. I will be your best man, and see that you marry one or the other of the girls, so that such marriage furthers your purpose. But all this is idle talk, and lunging at our own shadows. Let us go to the Parsonage at once, and see how the land lies. Come, make yourself a bit of a dandy. Change your work-a-day coat,



and give your hat an extra brush. What say you to the scheme? Come along. Oh! that's well. I forgot the slippers, but here stand your boots."

The Curate was soon equipped, and whilst assisting at the toilet, the Captain did not forget a satisfied glance at himself as he dusted the mirror with his handkerchief, ere they walked off together.



## CHAPTER IV.

BASKING in the bright sun of a summer morning in the cheerful bow windows of their drawing-room, Minnie and Fanny were sitting, when Mr. Bramley and Captain Lethbridge were announced. They were working busily and talking merrily, and had not heard the ring of the hall door bell, which idle people in the country are sure to hear, if looking out for amusement and *délassement*.

Minnie received the two gentlemen with a lady-like ease, bowing over her work, but not exactly putting it aside, feeling that she spoke and acted with less timidity whilst her eyes were so employed. Fanny had more self-possession,



and leaving an assortment of Dorcas charity clothing, which she was arranging, she came forward and conversed agreeably with Captain Lethbridge, talked of the beauty of the day, enquired for his aunt, and made Minnie a party in praising the pleasures of the evening they had spent in her society.

"Yes, she is very dear," he said, kindly, "and there is a great deal of quiet fun in her, when you know her as well as I do, and an elasticity in her heart very attractive. By the way, how nicely the duet came off between her and the Rector. A naturally sweet voice, I believe, never grows old."

He then spoke of the beauty of the parsonage domain; the glebe land, stretching up the hill; the snug little orchard occupying the ravine; the well-filled barn; and the extensive and gracefully cultivated flower garden, with its gay and gorgeous *parterre*, concluding by observing, and turning to Miss Lonsdale,

"The very outside of your dwelling, with its



grey stone and myrtled walls, depicts refinement, peace, and happiness."

Minnie took this speech more as a truism than a compliment, and mildly replied,

"Yes, we are, indeed, very happy here; there is nothing to make us otherwise. It is pleasant to live where one has always lived; and we are as attached to the dear old place as the Jews were to the stones of Jerusalem."

"And you do not find it dull and tiresome?" asked the Captain, with a little affectation of surprise. "Not one day as long as twenty, duly diversified?"

"No; the day is too short for all we have to put into it. We stretch it as much as we can by getting up early."

"Then you have not to send round the crier, with his,

"Oyez! Oyez!

LOST,

Somewhere between sunrise and sunset,

Two golden hours!"



"No, indeed," replied Minnie, continuing the quotation,

"Each set with sixty diamond minutes.  
No reward is offered, for they are  
Lost for ever!"

"And that is very sad," she added, with a touching and plaintive simplicity. "I think you are early risers in India, Captain Lethbridge?"

"Yes," he replied; "among our many good things, that is one of them."

"And you ride on elephants?" said Minnie.

"And eat pearls for peas?" said Fanny.

"And are so indolent," they both said together, "that the ladies are spoilt. Here we have to wait on ourselves, and our friends occasionally."

"Then you would like India?" he asked, quickly.

"No; indeed, we should not," they replied, in concert. "We are afraid of the heat, the rep-



tiles, and the insects; no, we should not like India."

The Captain was quite taken aback by this unexpected admission.

"Not like India!" he exclaimed, with an attempt at recovering himself. "Why, women are queens there! and men, not only their adorers, but their slaves. No one has ever really lived who has not lived in India. I have been trying to talk Bramley into changing positions, he being a lady's man. I have nearly had enough of it; and would gladly turn my sword into a ploughshare, and take possession of his rook's nest in the clouds—that quiet snuggery, sheltered, as it seems, from the breakers and shoals of life's troubled sea."

"Yes, he has a mind to make a bargain with me," said Bramley, counting at the same time the items in the Dorcas Charity Fund, which Fanny was placing before him, "but woe be to the parish with such a curate as he would make!"

"Well, I would do my best," replied the Cap.



tain. "But, my dear fellow, what are you going to do with that bundle? not carry it, surely! You do not expect me to walk with such a pack-man, do you? If this is to be a part of my parochial duty, I confess I shall find some difficulty in subscribing to the articles."

The girls protested there was no need of carrying these things; and Bramley said,

"A bad beginning, decidedly."

But he quietly put the bundle aside, as he continued,

"Parish work is not learnt in a day, nor in a year; and I fancy a whole regiment of soldiers are more easily managed than some of our stiff and self-righteous parishioners. It would never do, Lethbridge. Unaccustomed to contradiction, unskilled in talking to the poor, and knowing next to nothing of their ways of thought and feeling, keep to your own trade, Captain, and let me keep to mine. A 'fast' soldier may do very well; can you fancy, Miss Lonsdale, the Rector with a 'fast' curate?"



There was something very laughable in the idea, in counter distinction to Mr. Bramley, with his long coat and short trowsers, and his shoes too big for his feet. He still sat hugging the Dorcas bundle, in no way dismayed by the mirthful smile carried on at his expense.

"And so then must my new born zeal be quenched?" said the Captain, rising and brushing round his hat. "Looking at that bundle, I certainly feel weary and faint in my purpose. I might carry such a thing for a wager; but a clerical cooley, I could never be."

"And there is no need that you should," protested both the girls, at once. "Mr. Bramley delights in labouring in every way for the poor; we try to spare him all we can."

"Perhaps he does it to attract?"

"Oh! no," said Minnie; "that system never would answer. Be sure he does it for his work's sake; he has no other reward."

"I should doubt it," said the Captain; and with the sweeping bow the compliment implied,



he took his leave. Bramley also bowing himself out, but with one eye still fixed on the Dorcas bundle.

The two friends parted at the gate, and Bramley was soon back, requesting that he might carry the bundle that Fanny had so nicely arranged for the use of a poor neighbouring family, and so make sure of presenting it that very afternoon.



CHAPTER V.

WATCHING them as they crossed the line of road, Minnie, with a sigh of fatigue or something, said,

“The ‘creature’ is very handsome to look at, Fanny; but he is too superlative for use.”

“And the dear Bramley !” apostrophised Fanny. “Look how he is toiling up the hill.”

“A very different man, I grant, to the Captain; but much more suited to our every day wear. The other is a bright firework, that should only be let off on grand occasions. Still, he is amusing; but how blank he looked when we



protested against India. Did he fancy we would go with him at a moment's notice?"

"Do not say we, Minnie; for my declining the honour was merely a little spite of my own, to see how he would take it. There is no chance of my having the refusal."

"Neither shall I, Fanny."

"But why look so sad, Minnie? You cannot complain of either friendship unreturned, or unrequited love. And yet a deep cast of care is settled on your countenance. Tell me, Minnie, it cannot be that you fear Miss Lucy Paton?"

"Not one bit, my dear Fanny; she may have all the 'creatures' in the world for me, save one. And it is this that is worrying at my heart."

And then she told Fanny of Mr. Carsfield's proposal, and of her own rejection. The "No, Mr. Carsfield, no," had ever since sounded in her heart like the knell of friendship slighted, and love passed away.

"Then you do despair of him at last?" asked Fanny.



"No, I do not," said Minnie; "and yet I have sealed my own doom—have given up all that is good and honourable, because of his creed, when I know that he is a better Christian than half the folks going. But so it is; and I worry over what I have done. It seems so cruel—so unfeeling—to give up one who requires one's earnest care."

"But if hope is gone, Minnie, what then?"

"No, Fanny, it is not gone. *L'espoir est ma force*. 'Woe unto him that is faint-hearted,' says the son of Israel. And in all my trouble there is no possession equal to that of a stout heart and the hope—faint though it may be—of his eventual conversion."

The tears were flowing fast down Minnie's cheeks; and Fanny, to reassure her in a measure, said,

"But, Minnie, you have acted right. You could not have done otherwise; and he must respect you all the more—we will say nothing of



love—for being so staunch in your determination.”

She smiled, and then added,

“But did he really, Minnie—that stiff-starched, Quaker-like looking man—did he ever propose to you?”

“Yes, he really did,” replied Minnie; “and it hardly took me by surprise. I suspected it would come to this; and consequently my reply must have seemed cold, heartless, and unkind. And yet what otherwise could I have done?—what said? I could not marry him, so far away from me in the one essential point; and so I was obliged to say no. And I did say no; even whilst my heart was breaking in giving up one I love so dearly!”

It was evidently a heart-breaking recollection; and Fanny asked,

“And what did he say to you the next time you met him?”

“I have never seen him since. He keeps,



scrupulously away from the house ; and it is this, Fanny, that makes me so sick and so sad at heart. I ask myself, why should love create this disunion between us ?”

“ But he does not forget you,” said Fanny ; “ even now, I saw his man come in loaded with game and all sorts of good things.”

“ But that is his way,” returned Minnie, looking the picture of woe. “ He never forgets his friends, or the where he can do a kindness ; I can trace his beneficent hand all through the parish, doing good and speaking good. And, alas ! the day, from such an empty and barren source.”

“ Not his larder,” said Fanny, with an attempt at cheerfulness. “ Come, Minnie, dear, do look to the brightest side of things ; with all these kindly links still between you, you must neither despair or despond. A day may come, in God’s own time, when Mr. Carsfield may be more suited to you than he is at present ; let us pray for him, Minnie.”

“ I do pray for him,” she said, and there was



something solemnly touching in the smothered sadness of her tone. "I sometimes even fear he is too much the occupant of all my silent appeals to the throne of Grace. I do ask earnestly for his conversion—fervently! 'Go to that soul,' saith the Lord, 'for behold he prayeth.' But if the creature comes before the Creator, what then, Fanny?"

"Why, that is very bad, Minnie, I must say; but nothing to me is so bad as your taking such a desponding view of things. Let us wait patiently; the endurance of pain and pleasure is equally transient. Night and day so quickly follow each other, that it is only to hold on our way till the tide of events should turn in our favour. I say our, for recollect, my dear Minnie, that, independant of my care for you, my boat is not exactly in smooth water; but let us be of good courage, do not be so utterly cast down, my sweet cousin; look forward rather for a ray of hope, a bright and unexpected ray, to cheer you in your course, than take faint heart at the diffi-



culties which so sturdily present themselves ; don't let us even, as the Portuguese have it, 'admit the impossibility of possible things.' "

"The Christian heart never should despond," said Minnie, in a steady voice, and seeming more to respond to her own sad thoughts than to follow Fanny's clever 'elucidations. "But it seems to me it is such a simple thing I ask—a matter so for his good—a sacred duty, as it were, to interfere, to counsel, and to guide. And young though I am, yet how old I may count myself in the seeking and wishing for his welfare ; knowing his worth, I fancy and feel that our several paths lie not so wide apart but that I am justified in seeking to bring them together, to fearlessly stretch forth the friendly hand, and to interchange the word of kindness and encouragement; and he will listen even patiently to all this—he will talk of pleasant intercourse, of mutual esteem, and of sacred ties ; and he will say that differences should not be permitted to destroy our sympathies, or to mar our mutual charity and love."



"And what have you said to all this, Minnie?"

"It seems to me now that I have said but little; but ask me, Fanny, what I have ventured to hope, and oh! I could tell you of such bright visions, such cheering supports, that all things would work together for those who truly love and serve Him — that the rough ways would be made smooth, aye, and the crooked made straight. I have even ventured to believe in a God great enough to love, in a Christ strong enough to save, in a Heaven wide enough to hold us all, in an Eternal Love reigning supreme for ever over us, in a Kingdom of Heaven in which there are many mansions. But all this is wrong, Fanny. I find Mr. Carsfield true to his own faith; and I am left—left, Fanny, with no one but you to pity and console me."



## CHAPTER VI.

It was some comfort to Minnie thus to talk with Fanny over her sorrow; but it was a heavy weight at her heart that her father was still in ignorance of what had passed between herself and Mr. Carsfield. It required some courage on her part, but she felt that it might be somewhat of alleviation and modification of what she had to bear could she but give him simply a plain statement of the facts; and though she fully anticipated that he would be disappointed, she solaced herself with the assurance that she could not have done otherwise than she had done.



Still the wild sea of her feelings was tossing restlessly, and she was vexed with herself that she could not meet trouble with a hand, and heart, she might have added, steadier at the helm. She trusted that time would do what her own good sense failed to accomplish.

The opportunity soon presented itself. She was in her father's study, and she sat down by his side, simply because she could not stand; the act did not surprise him, but he soon saw by her manner that she had something of consequence to communicate. And then she told him, as clearly as she could narrate it, all that had passed; and she said, as even some extenuation to her own disconsolate feelings,

“How, under such circumstances, could I have acted otherwise than I have done?”

There was a long silence, and regaining her self-possession, she continued—

“It is not likely that Mr. Carsfield could have supposed that I would accept his proposal, or have married him under existing circum-



stances. If I had done so, what, dear papa, would you have said?"

The Rector required some little time to consider of this, and to recover himself. He took off his spectacles and put them on again.

"What would you have said, papa?"

Seeing there was no quarter, he replied,

"Said—said, my child—why, I must think it over a bit—perhaps I might have said that you had done well not to refuse a rich hand and an honest heart; still, I know your reasons, I grant you; but he is a good and worthy man, my friend Carsfield, in spite of his Unitarian principles. There is many a worse man going, Minnie—many a worse man; still, if you like Bramley better, why that's another thing. A poor person in opposition to one of riches and independence, standing well in the world, and with every qualification to make your happiness for life—"

"What kind of happiness, papa?"

"Why, a home of luxury and comfort—a home



of elegance and refinement—a home, my child, such as you would well grace, and which would put you on a par with nobility itself.”

“And is that all?” said Minnie; with a desponding shake of the head.

“All! yes, truly; and what more would you have? To see Minnie ambitious is a new phase in creation. What more, child, do you want?—house, wealth, and a kind and noble heart; surely these are enough?”

Minnie felt that all these advantages were such as she had no right to expect; and she replied—

“They are, in truth, my dear father, more than I need; they seem to comprise the whole of this world’s wealth; but there they end. It is, indeed, grievous to think what advantages would be mine were it not for that dreadful ‘if,’ which must defeat my every purpose.”

Her father saw that there was some demur, so he said quickly—

“It is far from my wish, Minnie, to talk you



into a marriage you may not approve. It is true that Carsfield is older than you are by a great deal, and it is hardly likely that a girl of your age would love a man under such a disparity of years; but then you are so different to the generality of girls. I never doubt for a moment but that you would make the happiness of my friend. And besides, you have known him so long, and are so well acquainted with his queer old bachelor ways, so that you would not enter upon a new position without some slight insight into its advantages and responsibilities."

"I am aware of that," Minnie replied; "my responsibilities would run parallel with my advantages; but I will not barter my true life for any such like things. My object now is to disentangle myself from all these allurements, and to see the case in its real light."

"And what is that light?" asked the Rector.

"In a religious light," she replied, "and which is the only light that can separate me from one



I so dearly esteem. It is right that you should know that it requires all my best energies and strength of decision to act as I do. I will simply tell you that I love Mr. Carsfield, and my sad heart is filled with sorrow, and love, and anxiety on his account." The tears were quietly coursing down her cheeks, as she added, "I grieve to think I have hurt his kind feelings in thus seeming unthankful for his preference—one for whom I would live to honour, and die to serve."

"A fiddle, my dear, for his feelings!" said the Rector; "if he is an Unitarian, but I very much question whether he is." Still the father looked distressed and puzzled, as he added, "I can quite enter into your objections, my Minnie; this Unitarian view of the case is an objection, certainly, and how such a man as Carsfield came to be one is past my comprehension. I suppose his father was one, and his grandfather before him; and thus does one evil foster another. Still, in these enlightened days, how Carsfield can persist, is to me a puzzle; and that you have not talked



him out of such a creed long ago, is even a greater mystery; the force of example might do something for him. Such a stickler for Church and State as I am!" and here he warmed a little, adding, "and to think that a daughter of mine should marry a Dissenter! I fear it will not do, Minnie; I could not go down in peace to my grave if so it should be."

"And yet you are sorry that I refused Mr. Carsfield?"

"Yes, Minnie, I candidly tell you that I am sorry—sorry that you could not have hit on some intermediate course; at the same time that I am not sorry to see your hatred of dissent. It is a good deal to give up, my child, seeing the position in which you stand. I admire your firmness, at the same time that I deplore the result. Let me tell you that Carsfield is not a man to be met with every day of the week—a union with him would have been a position for you to the end. Sensibly I begin to feel age creeping on—my life is uncertain. You wish me to speak



candidly, so, with candour, I must confess I should have felt a worldly peace at heart in leaving you in such good hands; it is throwing a good thing from you, my child."

"Papa, you must not talk so," she replied, hastily; "for your happiness I would do a great deal," and here her tears fell fast. "I should like to make your old age rich by my love and duty; but to make you so at the risk of all I hold sacred, that I could not do."

"Keep to your text, my dear girl, and act right to yourself and others. There is not much harm done; still it would have been a provision for you, and thereby your sisters would never have wanted a home."

"They surely need not want that yet."

The Rector seemed to catch at a new idea, and replied—

"No, that is very true, indeed they need not." Here he pondered a moment, and then continued, "It is untoward—very untoward; you cannot marry Carsfield; but why not marry Bramley?"



There he is, rich in his own rough worth! marry Bramley, I say, and let me leave him the living at my death. A son would have put all this matter straight, but girls are very different subjects to deal with; a son-in-law, however, comes nearly to the same thing, so let us cheer up, and look a-head;—marry Bramley, and make this still your home, for I candidly tell you to whatever age I may be spared, he shall not have the living until I drop. Residing under my roof I would soon make him understand who was master and who was not. To part with you, my Minnie, even to the red house, would be a trial to me, and a grief. What say you to taking the curate? and so let us settle the matter.”

“I would not have him,” she replied, “had he livings upon livings his own. But that need not occupy us; he has never asked me to have him, and with the feelings I entertain towards him it is not likely he ever will.” Then, with a dolorous shake of the head, she added, “it will be a long time ere I shall love again. My course



of true love has not run smooth. I feel now that I ought to have curbed so woeful a predilection. Still I have been led on by a bright, though foolish hope ; my heart's first wish has been to strive for his conversion, to pray that so it might be ; I now feel it has been a weak, a presumptuous delusion. And yet I have persisted, labouring in season and out of season, and leaving the rest trustfully to the God of benediction."



## CHAPTER VII.

It is a matter of question, whether trees may not have ears, and stones may not be dumb. Be this as it may, it must be from some causes of this sort that news is whispered about. And it was very soon known in the peaceful village of Stoke, that Miss Lonsdale, the Rector's daughter, had positively refused Mr. Carsfield. It was a subject of much wonder to many ; for though there was a disparity of years, and the difference of creed might make an objection, yet, taking his position and his rent-roll into consideration, they knew it



would be acceptable to the Rector, this excellent provision for his child.

Captain Lethbridge and Mr. Bramley soon held a congress on the subject.

"Is it true?" the one asked.

"Is it true?" the other re-echoed, instead of attempting to answer the question.

"By Jove! then," exclaimed the Captain, "I will not despair." He looked at Bramley, and saw his face was pale, his hands cold, and then he trembled from head to foot.

"Can it be possible?" at length he murmured, with an effort. "Do you think it is true, and that she is free to choose? Little do you know, Lethbridge, or the world around, how that sedate old fellow, good though he may be, has ever been a stumbling block in my path. I have loved her these many years, and to think—"

"Don't think at all," shouted the Captain; "the story has it that she has refused him; and if so, she is free—free!" he repeated with a sort of "hip! hip! hip! hurrah!"



"Free!" re-echoed Bramley. "Gracious powers! who can say, who will be the next successful candidate?"

In a mock heroic style the Captain said,

"It is not in mortals to command success,  
But we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it."

And he drew himself up, and curled his moustache, and looked ready for a start somewhere, as he strode backwards and forwards, and rubbing his hands together in the last stage of excitement. Then turning to Bramley, who still sat pale and aghast, he said,

"Well, my good fellow, what are we to do first? how are we to settle the point at issue? It is right that we should distinctly understand the order of march, or we shall be jostling and interfering with each other. As we are neither of us sentimentally in love with the maiden in question, what say you to tossing up for the first proposal?"

"Answer for yourself, Lethbridge, and do not add to the torment of my feelings by speaking



thus slightly. My love for her has hitherto been a thought, without form and void: the knowledge that she is free, glitters over me like a star, that both dazzles and subdues me."

Lethbridge laughed outright, and Bramley added, somewhat angrily,

"It is all very well to make a jest of it. Your fortune is made, and you have a good profession in India to return to. A wife would be in your way."

"Be gads! my friend, I do not mean to return to India without one. My time in England is drawing short, and this chance really falls in very opportunely. She is cold and timid in her ways, one of those diffident damsels whose blushes constitute her great beauty. Who knows but what she may have refused the old Unitarian for my sake."

"Or for mine," said Bramley. "I could name you a hundred evidences in my favour."

"We will take them all for granted," inter-



rupted the Captain, with some impatience; "chimeras all, I daresay. Let us compare notes. Did she ever whisper to you, when she might have spoken aloud? Did she ever select you the largest plum in the dish? Did she ever look confused when you unexpectedly fell in her way? Did she—"

"Oh! yes, lots of these 'dids,' " pettishly interrupted the Curate; "to name them would sound so poor, in comparision to their reality. Who can doubt the intonation of the voice, the sympathy, the song selected saying so much. And then the deep mild look of those earnest eyes! I have thousands of such memories crowding with unmistakeable certainty on my heart."

"And much good will they profit us," in his turn interrupted the Captain. "Prithee let us put all these tender reminiscences aside, and in their stead, be up and doing. This sentimentality brings us no way nearer to our mark."



"But, my dear fellow, it is all very fine talking, but what shall I do?" asked Bramley in a piteous and perplexed tone.

"Why go smack up to the rectory, to be sure," answered the Captain, in a grave decision of tone. "You shall take the first chance; leave your card, if she is out; and if she is at home, go in. Make your best salaam, and come out an engaged man, or a discarded one, which will do as well. Love, my dear fellow, is an active principle; you are now taking the part of a stop gap. Remember I have not much more than two months, to settle all preliminaries. You folks in England are so slow; India is the country to pop, slap dash. So prithee be taught our wisdom, and go at once and pop the question. Let me know the result in double quick time, and I will hold myself in readiness to pick up the pieces."

Thus a good understanding was kept up between the Curate and his friend, and which seemed in no way disturbed by their mutual admiration for the fair Minnie. They continued to chaff and



joke each other ; pleased thus even to talk of her, and letting no ill-tempered raillery interrupt the harmony of their discourse.

"Assuredly on second thoughts," said the Captain, "she can hardly be in love with me yet ; but if you don't look sharp, another meeting may do it."

"I have more respect for destiny than to feel that," replied Bramley. "All contingencies have a Providence in them, and my belief is, that marriage is over rated, and that it is, after all, no doing of our own."

"And so you propose to take it coolly, forgetting the advice, *Aid toi, et Dieu t'aidera*. Cupid, recollect, is a mad little devil, a regular sharpshooter, and is either doing us good or harm. Put your shoulder to the wheel, Bramley, say I. Love, they tell us, is the result of contrast. And it is something in your favour, that you are as unlike your lady love as chalk is from cheese."

Now Bramley did not like this ; neither the



remark, nor the hurry the Captain seemed in to decide their fate. There was a flutter at his heart, rather than any emulation to be the first to cast the die.

"There is luck in leisure," he observed quietly.

"An old woman's fable," blustered forth the Captain.

"But she has hardly had time to turn round," still persisted Bramley. "Her heart must be all in commotion; and the battle gained too soon, has to be fought again."

"Then you give in?"

"Not a jot."

And with this they separated—the Captain to join his aunt at dinner, and Bramley was left in his rook's nest to ponder over his possibilities.



## CHAPTER VIII.

AND when so left it was difficult for the Curate to collect his scattered ideas, to condense his anxious thoughts. There was a happy task open before him. It was but right that he should know his doom; but how to frame the time, place, and opportunity was another matter to settle. There was a turmoil in his feelings that would not be cooled down. He sat up late that night: he tried to read, but apparently to little purpose. On reaching the end of the page he found that his thoughts had been with Minnie. He saw her, as it were, photographed before him—her bright look, her mildly beaming dark brown eyes, the grace-



ful manner of her every movement, a creature so beautiful in herself! How could he ever hope to achieve the blessing he coveted ?

The Curate's fire waxed feeble, his solitary candle sank deeper in its socket, and despairing of bringing his mind to any tone, he was about to close his book, when he read,

"What the most serious reflections on the greatness and perfectability of man could ever accomplish, has been effected by the influence of a pure and innocent love."

"The influence of a pure and innocent love" he repeated; and his face beamed with a bright and trustful joy as he added, "Minnie Lonsdale, you must be mine; there is no such cruelty in the world as to keep you from me."

And Bramley retired to rest as a soldier about to take the field in the morning. He slept under a confusion of dreams, and his waking plans had not been so venturesome as those of his evening's speculations. He tried even to prolong his sleep, for he was loath to see the day-light dawn upon



him ; so he turned again on his pillow ; and then left it hastily, for its thorns beset him. With the mind so much astir, it was better for the body to be up and doing.

He could now admit to himself that the subject before him was difficult and embarrassing ; but it required both discretion and tact ; and with his heart so full of love, so tremulous with fear, how could he manage these two things ? Still his cool reflection bade him not to rush hastily upon his doom. So he procrastinated his breakfast, and was glad that the eggs and toast were long in coming, thanking his old servant so politely as she put them down, that she gave a momentary glance to see what was come to her master.

His mind was evidently not in its usual *assiette* ; still, he made a sort of pretence to himself that all things were going on the same. He was glad that the sun shone bright, for it seemed to give him somewhat of confidence.

“ To be, or not to be,” he said, with a touch



of the heroic, and then repeated it as a timid school boy who fears that he is not perfect in his lesson. "To be, or not to be? Why, everything is to be or not to be!"

And then his mind dived into Hamlet's soliloquy; and this only made matters worse, and he was going over it in a sing song sort of ditty, when he was interrupted by fancying he heard the swing of the little wicket gate. It usually announced the approach of his friend the Captain—his rival—and he was sorry a fancy shot through his kind heart that he did not, as was his wont, feel glad to see him. He put himself in a bustle and called for his boots, determined that the Captain should see him in some progress; but by the time he had placed himself in the *pose* and occupation of vigorously brushing his hat, he saw that he had been needlessly aroused. There was no Captain, and he was left to make his own way and to fight his own battle.

Still the day was advancing and the hours flew on, yet seeing little done. But, as we have said,



the sun shone bright in the heavens, and from this he augured of good. "Happy is the bride that the sun shone on," rung in his ears. Not very applicable, he settled, but just sufficient to amuse; and repeating the old distich helped to divert him in his thoughts.

Then he looked at the bright Rectory grounds. The smoke curled up from the drawing-room chimney, and he determined to begin his march, yet fearing that every turn of the road would bring him in contact with his antagonist, the Captain, hastening on the same errand.

He hoped, as he approached nearer and nearer, that he might find Minnie in the sitting-room alone. It was not likely, for Fanny was always in the way. And then he began to arrange what, finding her alone, he would say. He wished he had made a pencil sketch of what his maiden speech should be. Ought he to blurt out at once his wishes, or merely to make them an episode? He could not tell—men never told; there was no *carte du pays* whatever for these occasions.



He tried to think what would be best, and the more he thought the more it tended to undermine his self-possession and the firmness he so eminently needed.

Feeling at length that he could in no way screw his courage to the sticking place, he came to the determination of seeking an interview with the Rector. There was in this decision plenty of parish business to make the way smooth, until he himself chose to touch on the point so dearly at his heart. And this would, at all events, help him to steady his voice, and to feel at home, until the point at issue could be expressed. So he whistled cheerily to his dog, assured himself there was nothing of which he was to be afraid, and boldly walking up the avenue, he rung at the hall door bell.

This done, he was prepared to rush in, but he had, after a due course of waiting, which seemed to him an age, to ring again. And this was teasing, as it only served to increase his ever increasing agitation. And when the servant did



come and reply, she looked so provokingly careless and indifferent, and did not even know whether her master was at home or not, that it all seemed got up on purpose to plague him, and this only irritated him still further.

He, however, entered the hall, and there, whilst waiting for he seemed to know not what, he saw Minnie slowly coming down the broad oaken stairs. Had he not changed his programme this would have been propitious, but he had. And as it was he could only say, waving his hand,

“Go back, Minnie; it is with your father I wish to speak.”

Minnie, thinking it was some parish matter, did as she was bid, wondering at the same time what could be the hurry of the affair, and why Mr. Bramley should presume to call her by her Christian name. He was odd, certainly, but this was such an odd thing to do.

The Curate then turned into the first room he came to, and there sat the Rector, quiet and unconcerned—the very opposite to his clerical friend



—meekly re-modelling some old sermon for the coming Sunday, and testifying by his quiet pomposity that he was doing great things.

He bade his Curate take possession of an easy chair, and then said leisurely,

“Nothing very pressing, I presume? Rest yourself, my friend. Just one line, and I have done. ‘And Hazael said, but what! is thy servant a dog that he should do these great things’ There’s a good wind up. Now, Bramley, I am ready to listen.”

The wind up was not very complimentary to the man who was catching at straws—at least, so Bramley could not help applying it, and the quantum of resolution he had amassed seemed to melt away before it.

“Anything wrong, sir?” asked the Rector, with his eye still on his sermon, and again repeating—“‘That he should do these great things.’”

“Oh! dear, no,” replied Bramley, with an attempt at unconcern. “The glass has fallen, I believe.”



"Oh! never mind that," said the Rector, "the corn is all in. Let it rain if it pleases."

And then his eye again wandered off to his sermon.

And all this time Bramley sat as one transfixed. He felt as though he were a molten image, with not a word at his disposal. The weather, the parish, the pulpit, all redolent of small talk, now offered him nothing. He was speechless—he was a dumb man that could not open his mouth, and with nothing to offer in extenuation. And there he sat—and there the Rector sat, evidently uneasy at so losing his time. Twenty minutes the old divine always gave to his sermons—the old fashioned time—and he knew well that he was now wasting these twenty minutes. With his eye on the clock, he knew exactly how the time went. "Time warns me to conclude," he would say, as the minute hand came round to a certain point.

Bramley extended his sermons beyond the half hour. Sad nonsense! the Rector felt; such new



fangled notions ! And with the consideration of this fact now forced upon him, the Rector turned round to give him a lecture on this case in point subject, and Bramley remained passive—relieved, as it were, by this turn of events.

But the Rector's say was soon said. It was indeed an old story, and the taking to task fell meekly to the ground for want of opposition. Bramley was tame, passive—a poor soul, as the Rector inwardly expressed it ; and struck by this unwonted silence, he turned round upon him suddenly to see what was the matter. The struggle between hope and fear was still going on. He was pale and tremulous, and wretchedly sick at heart, wishing to make the plunge—the Captain, as it were, treading at his heels, and yet losing all power, all words to express his anxious mission.

“ I think a glass of wine, my good fellow, will do you good,” said the Rector. “ You are not quite in your usual trim. You change colour and blush like a timid girl.” And ringing the bell



as he spoke, he continued, "We must see if we cannot put you to rights."

Presently the door opened, and a meek voice asked if papa wanted anything? the servants were not in the way.

"Yes, Minnie, you will do very well. Go and bring in some wine, and see if you can cheer one of a heavy heart."

She did as she was bid; and offering some to Mr. Bramley, with her usual tender sympathy, she held out her hand to him, expressing, as he took it, her regret to find his so cold and uncongenial.

Bramley, though encouraged by her manner, did not like the last word she used; and he answered, as something in a measure to forward his suit,

"The heart is happily uninfluenced by climate or temperament, be the hand ever so cold."

"I don't know," said Minnie, in a quaint way. "I think a cold day is very apt to try it. But what is the matter, Mr. Bramley? You seem all to pieces. Have you heard bad news? Is your



cousin, Miss Lucy, fickle? or are you repentant of your own tender vows?"

"Don't trifle with me, Miss Lonsdale," he said, in a solemn manner.

"Then it is so," she repeated; "you are sick and sad. I assure you I feel for you from the bottom of my heart."

The Rector laughed, and observed,

"I should have called you to the rescue sooner, Minnie. Go on, persevere, find it all out. Give Bramley some 'speak out' cake. I truly believe the man's in love."

Minnie looked pleased, gave her hands a joyous clap, and exclaimed,

"Oh! do be in love, Mr. Bramley. It is Fanny—dear Fanny! Let me go and call her, and tell her of her joy."

The curate looked more solemn than ever; and rising from his seat, and interrupting her course, he said, in a choking sort of voice,

"No, Miss Lonsdale; Miss Minnie—my own Minnie—it is you."

"Me?"



"Yes, 'me;' you, and you only."

"And not Fanny?"

"No, decidedly not. But listen, I am come to offer you my hand and my heart. My hand, I fear, is not worth much; but my heart, Minnie, is full of admiration and love. The presumption on my part, is great, I grant; but I know that—"

"Spare all discussion, for my sake," interrupted Minnie, with a steady, yet benign tone. "I am sensible of your kindness—your uniform kindness—and I thank you for your good opinion; but you must understand," turning very pale as she spoke, and looking at her father as though fearing to express what she was about to utter; "a few words will suffice." And her countenance brightened into the most brilliant hue, as she added, "It is right that you should know in reply to the offer you have made me, that my affections are engaged—deeply and truly engaged—and with no reservation for me whatever."



There was something most heavenly in her look—resignation, mixed with a holy love; and Bramley did not for a moment doubt what she said.

He collected himself as well as he could, and hurried from the house, letting the avenue gate swing after him, unmindful of his dog—his heart utterly cast down; and as he mounted the steep ascent to his rook's nest in the clouds, he piteously wished he never had been born. He could only say, as he recovered, in a measure, from the extreme shock he had sustained,

“Happy the man who has obtained those affections; rejoicing under a lucky star is he, who may one day call her his own.”

With a sing-song sort of philosophy he sought to settle, as he sunk in his easy chair, that, however hard to bear, whatever is for the best; yet was he sick at heart thus to give up the idol of his sweet thoughts, his desperate castle building, his chances of walking into the living, rejoicing there under the sunbeams of Minnie's



smile; and when he died, to repose under the old yew tree, in the quiet grave-yard near. He was in some confusion under the answer he had gained. She had told him that she loved; she had frankly confessed that her affections were engaged, giving him no one single glance whatever; and pondering over this, with a cutting conclusion, it came to Bramley's heart that his friend Lethbridge was the happy man, and that he himself had been sported with, and urged on to propose to her, merely to test this love.

And now the pain would be to meet his friend, to reproach him, and to tell him all that had passed. The conclusion was only too certain; yet Bramley, a child in malice, felt no resentment. He wished that the Captain had been more explicit—that his bright companion had told him of his success; he almost felt that hearing it from him, in his pleasant way of speaking the truth, he might not only have learnt to congratulate him, but to have helped him as much as lay in his power to gain the object of his choice,



When the garden gate slammed as usual the next morning, disappointed love was so far sobered down, that Bramley looked from his breakfast room window with a cordial smile to welcome his friend. He bade him, with a cheerful tone, come in; and as he sat beside him, he grasped his hand tightly, thinking that friendly clutch would overcome every suspicion of evil; and he said,

“Lethbridge, you are right to come thus boldly; there should be no deceit between friend and friend. Do not let me suppose for an instant that I have been deceived in your confidence—you, whom I would trust as a brother; still, I should have been spared a moment of deep trial to my feelings, had you been as candid as I believed you to be.”

“What’s up?” asked the Captain, sitting uneasily in his chair, and wishing to urge Bramley on a little faster in his speech.

“Why, her affections are engaged, Lethbridge! —Minnie Lonsdale! She told me so herself;



and if they are engaged, what is left for me to believe, but that you have played a double part? One word from you would have put the matter right; and I, in lieu of proposing to her as I did yesterday, might have kept my love and my feelings to myself."

"But, my friend," replied the Captain, in amaze; "what do I know about the matter? Be reasonable, and, above all, be just. I repeat, what can I possibly know about the matter? Why lay the blame, if there is any, all on me? My good fellow, you are saddling the wrong horse."

Bramley shook his head, and then said, with seriousness,

"In this little sanctum, speak to me explicitly, Lethbridge, and I will bear all you say with firmness and, I trust, with kindness. You know that she loves you, and this has all been done in sport."

"Not I," said the Captain, in unfeigned surprise. "Tell me at once what you mean. I can-



not stand this suspense." He looked excited, and then added quickly, "You don't mean to say that she told you she loved me?"

"Not exactly that," replied Bramley, with a smile; "but she said her affections were engaged. These were her own words—'My affections are engaged;' and we know that there is no one but you and myself, since she has discarded the old Unitarian, on whom to fix this love."

"I cannot flatter myself," said the Captain, blushing to his eyes. "No, Bramley, you have mistaken the thing; love is an insidious affair, it is true. I could name a hundred tropes of her esteem, as I have done before; but they all fall so poor when sounded in bright day light, that I shall not utter them until I know for a certainty that she loves."

"And then?" asked Bramley.

"The moon will be too low a leap for me. Goodness! how my heart bounds at the idea! and you, Bramley, look as white as a turnip."



"I feel sick," said the Curate, "quite sick at heart; to have overcome one obstacle, and then to meet with another. Carsfield was bad enough; but you, Lethbridge—*et tu, Brute!* and the plague is, I cannot but admire her taste."

"It grieves me to pity you; still, at the same time, there is no reason why I should feel depressed, unless it be to see a worthy comrade fall in the combat."

"I wish," sighed Bramley, "I had never entered the lists."

"You must, however, recollect that if your chance is gone, mine is very equivocal. All girls, I believe, like homage; still I shall be in no hurry to make the venture. I cannot ask you to sit cross legged for me, Bramley, for if I do not find you hanging to the bell-rope, it is as much as I can expect, under your present dolorous circumstances. *Au revoir*, my boy, you will soon hear of me should any luck turn up; but I shall not be in a hurry to be made a fool of. Excuse me, Bramley, it is better to see how the land



lies. I am pretty vain, but not such an ass as Shakespeare's Malvolio, with his cross gartering. If the lady does favour me, what can a fellow do?"

Bramley did not know, he was sure; in short, he was pettish and spent.

"*Au revoir!*" said the Captain again; and the Curate, for the first time in his life, was not sorry to see him take up his cap, and to get rid of him.



## CHAPTER IX.

AND now we must retrace our steps a little, and see what effect Minnie's refusal of Carsfield had upon the owner of the large red house, as he sat solitarily within those capacious walls, lost in loneliness and wonderment, that Minnie—the gentle Minnie—should so steadfastly have rejected him.

“But did I think she would accept me?” he asked himself. And the reply came spontaneously, “No, I certainly did not; there is a barrier between us, Minnie;” and he gave it the mildest term he could; “a stumbling block, and a disunion in a certain point.”



And in his mind he looked towards Minnie, as he would to a bright star, that, at all events, took an interest in his course. But there was a pride in the stiff owner of the large red house; it was so strange to enter into controversy with so mere a child—to be dictated to, thwarted in carrying out a scheme really for her eventual good. So, rather than cherish the conviction that Minnie was right, he began to argue in his own mind with infinite skill on connection, distribution, knowledge, and wisdom—a blind argument, as it were, for he already began to feel that the gentle, the heavenly-minded Minnie had taught him something better. Had she not given him reason to believe that she loved him? He felt that she had; and this, contrasted with her firm refusal of him, was only the more staggering—he who possessed everything to make her happy.

And his eye glanced over some of his handsome pieces of furniture.

“Minnie should live in a house like this,” he



said, "reflecting back on these goodly things her own bright presence; and why does she not?"

Knowing that his own consent was gained, he paused and pondered, making a shew to himself that it was difficult to explain why she should thus stand in the way of her own promotion.

And a pure stream of light seemed to come to his heart, as he thus pondered—a spiritual light, penetrating, as it were, with piercing intelligence the depths and the secret thoughts of his hard mind; and then he said, carelessly—

"Minnie has set her heart upon the pearl of price—she would have me acknowledge the one great bond of union—to lift up the veil. Dear little Minnie, not speaking irrelevently, steadfast in her spirit of truth, shall rise, like the dove whose wings are of silver, and whose feathers are like gold, doing what no human reasoning, nor human eloquence, nor human argument hath hitherto done—in her own heavenly worth,



breathing into the mind the Holy Spirit of God."

Carsfield was alone—he knew he was, and he looked round for his Bible. It rested on the top of his library shelf. He took pains to move the steps that he might reach it. He pulled out his handkerchief, and wiped the dust from it; and as he pressed it to his bosom in his descent, he felt that he was nearer Minnie in thus doing. And he opened the book and read it with serious intent; he knew it was her daily comfort and guide.

"She is so simple, and yet so determined," he said, speaking aloud his inmost thought. "Were it not that I know her so well I might suspect that she acted from a domineering spirit; but this is not her way—such one might resist: the mind and the heart speaking through her countenance; and then her faith!"

And he read her book, as he called it, and it was searching the scriptures—a deep search into



spiritual life that opened to him, unawares, as it seemed, the true and holy faith. Thus, link by link, was a chain of piety being wove about his heart. It was she who was unfolding to him the beauties of spiritual life, she who led him to the fountain of living water, she on whose sweet face was mirrored the reflection of Heaven; and to this *she* he had offered his heart and his hand, and by this *she* he had been rejected. What to do he did not know. Should he go to the Rector and make his complaint? Oh! no; Minnie must be his of her own free will; and thus, whilst his mind was chafed with care, his heart torn by excitement, the good seed was being sown, and the proud, stiff Unitarian might have said from his heart "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."



## CHAPTER X.

SOME clever writer has said that "He who will not reason is a bigot; he who dare not reason is a coward; and he who cannot reason is a fool." Minnie Lonsdale was neither the one nor the other; yet she confessed her head to be in a state of perplexity after the curate's visit, and his most unexpected declaration. It might have amused her, but that it took from her the solemnity of her sorrow; it seemed to make hearts too common a commodity of every day traffic, and she hoped the affair would never come to Mr. Cars-



field's knowledge. She was not aware that she had any pride in her before ; she now felt it was a degradation to have given up the one aspirer for her hand, and to have taken the other.

She sought her cousin Fanny, and, with a provoked sort of smile, she told her what had passed, adding—

“ It was so simple of Mr. Bramley not to know that I could not accept him ; and that in paying me the compliment he did, he had nothing of return to expect from my poor widowed heart. I almost fancy now, Fanny, it must have been a mistake, or a sort of prelude—a bold stroke for a wife—and that even now, instead of wearing the willow, he will merely change the object of his intentions.”

“ What ! and ask me to have him ?”

“ Yes, Fanny, and no harm done ; you know that you do not love him one jot the less for this *contretemps*. If he loves me, and you love me,



and I love you, may not his love eventually flow in the same channel ?”

“It may,” replied Fanny, somewhat disconsolately, “yet it is not very complimentary; but why did you reject him, Minnie? You have given up Mr. Carsfield, and now you throw cold water on the curate. Has the gallant captain anything to do with it?”

“Good now!” said Minnie, in her Devonshire *patois*, and with a repugnant shake of the head. “Nothing whatever; if love will not out-live even faith and hope, there is still charity to soothe and console it: it is not because a difference of creed stands in my way that I am to give up respect and esteem so hastily, and take another because he makes me the offer. Mr. Bramley is all very well in his way, and when he sees the merits of my dear Fanny he will be, in my eyes, perfection.”

“And in the meantime is there nothing that will cheer you?”



“No, Fanny, and the worst is, I do not wish to be cheered. I am just in the condition of the poor maid whose desire was—

“ ‘ To sit upon a mossy stone,  
And sigh where none can hear.’

“Still it is not right to give way to such feelings, for I have better duties to perform; but I am in truth very, very sad, and I know that for a time things cannot be otherwise; and I am afraid that papa is vexed, and wishes that it might have been different; still, he is very good and considerate, and does not talk about it; and this is harder to bear than anything he could say; and I can never think of the subject but with tears. I might have made the happiness of so many, and now, at least, one is made miserable.”

Occupation was her only cheerful relief—a sort of running from herself. So she determined that her daily life should go on as usual, that she would visit the schools and the parishioners, with even more than her wonted assiduity. She



had seen Mr. Carsfield at a distance, and had followed in the wake of his kind and charitable deeds; but it was clear to her that he avoided her. The Rector had met him, and he had enquired after them all. She wished to know the exact words he had used.

“What did he say, papa?”

“I think,” the Rector replied, “he merely inquired after my daughters.”

And Minnie now wished that she had let it pass; settling, in her disappointment, that curious people, in the way of listeners, never hear any good of themselves.



## CHAPTER XI.

AND the cousins, as it were, by tacit consent, forbore to speak of either Carsfield or Bramley. Fanny saw that with Minnie it was too tender a subject on which to dwell; and Minnie was deeply annoyed that the Curate should, as it were, have made her a party concerned in putting an end to any hopes that Fanny might entertain of an eventual return of affection.

And so they began to talk of the Captain; and whilst they were commenting on his evident love of solitude, and the constancy of his visits to the hill side, he one day, in quiet majesty,



"sloped in," as he called it, bringing some trifling message from his aunt to the Rector.

The girls were at work as usual in the large sunny bay window; and as they received him, they seemed to know him better, and not to feel so very scared at the approach of the lion of the neighbourhood.

So he mixed with them more at ease, and talked of the new books of the day, and of the fashions; admired their tapestry work--a cushion for the altar.

"These clerical colours contrast well together," he said; "blue and crimson. It shews no bad taste in the church."

"Ecclesiastical colours," interposed Fanny.

The Captain looked puzzled, but replied, gaily,

"Ah! you understand all the Canons, Rubrics, and orders of the church. We poor fellows in India content ourselves with the drum-head for our pulpit. Do you wonder then at my wishing



to extend my leave ; not being yet tired of England or the peaceful serenity of this beautiful valley."

He bowed as a sort of compliment to his present company as he spoke ; but it was a sweeping sort of bow ; and Minnie left it to Fanny, and Fanny to Minnie, to acknowledge it. There was nothing in the way of progress here ; so he made a bold dash at what promised to interest them all, and asked if they had seen Bramley lately ?

"The man is moon struck," he continued ; "I cannot prevail with him to come down from the clouds."

Here he fixed his fine dark eyes on Minnie. She did not look unconscious ; but there was a little throw up of her head—a careless jerk of her needle, that evidently explained she held him at nought ; and she replied,

"You say right ; I do think our good friend sometimes lives in the clouds."



She bent down over her work as she spoke;  
and the Captain said, in a softened tone,

“Keeping company with the angels; such high  
aspirations as he has the boldness to attempt,  
must hold him in the ethereal air, midway be-  
tween earth and heaven,

“‘An angel face—an angel’s mien,’

and an angel’s kindness.”

“No, indeed,” interposed Fanny, in a petu-  
lant sort of way, “not much of that; I wish  
you only knew how badly the poor man is  
treated.”

“Then why do not you take pity on him, Miss  
Fanny?”

“There is no such luck for me,” she an-  
swered; “for I know his work, and pity him from  
my heart.”

“And pity is near akin to love,” again  
breathed the Captain. “And you pity him, Miss



Lonsdale? At all events, he assuredly has your pity?"

"No," said Minnie, considering as she spoke, "I cannot say he has. I have even a better feeling towards him; I both esteem and admire Mr. Bramley as a zealous worker in the vineyard, where there is ever so much good work to be done."

"He does work," replied the Captain, musingly; "I never saw such a fellow! In this cottage, and then into another; I wonder sometimes how he has the face to go and proffer charity where it seems really so little needed."

"Oh! he knows full well," said Minnie, "where it is acceptable; and where the wants are not openly proclaimed by dirt and rags, surely this unasked charity—this manna from Heaven, is a manifestation of God's own mercy. Mr. Bramley's object in life seems to consist in the pleasure of going about and doing good."

"And a little love?"



"Oh! yes," said Minnie, with a vexed sort of quickness, "poor humanity must have its weakness."

"Is it weakness, then, to love, Miss Lonsdale?"

"Certainly not," she replied, with the utmost gravity; "but in this instance it is, as it were, water spilt on the ground. Mr. Bramley might have known better."

"And his punishment?"

"Not having the thing he coveted."

"And is there no appeal?"

"No; none. Do you take an interest in your friend, Captain Lethbridge, or is this merely idle talk? If the former, let me tell you at once, that my destiny is to be unhappy in my first love; my first, and I think now, my last. So let not your friend take my rejection as a slight upon himself; he might have known, with a little observation, there was no hope for him. But it is so true—even seeing him so often as I



did!—that the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermedleth with it not. It was no disrespect to him.”

And Minnie looked so sweetly sad as she spoke, that “the creature” felt, loving her as he could have done, that she was almost too good for him. An angel she seemed; and he decided for his own peace, that a mortal would suit him much better.

So he turned and talked with Fanny; and here, amid bantering, jesting, and flirtation, he learnt from her also that her affections were engaged; and that he must even seek farther than this, if he hoped or intended to take a wife back with him to India.

“The deuce is in the girls!” he exclaimed to himself, as he twisted his moustache, and walked off rather at a discount in his own estimation. “They surely are not aware in this land’s end sort of place, of the pearl that lies before them. *A la bonne heure*, and no harm done; destiny,



fatality—the wife in the closet, and sure eventually to be found.”

Then looking round the country in the manner a dog does who has missed his master, he quietly added,

“But where in the name of patience am I to find her?”

He made no secret of his visit to his friend Bramley, nor of the impression he had formed of Minnie Lonsdale's excellence, saying,

“She is decidedly too good for me, or for you ; we can neither of us aspire to her. I wish her happy from my heart ; and if virtue meets with its reward, she will surely fall in with hers.”

He then recounted the conversation they had held, and the part that Fanny had borne in it ; and he concluded by saying,

“If that little girl—that cousin—is not in love with you, Bramley, never trust me !”

Bramley did not care ; he did not want any-



body's love. And then after a little, he would ask,

“But tell me—tell me, Lethbridge, what else did the gentle Minnie say?”



## CHAPTER XII.

AND whilst all these *contretemps* were going on, this Midsummer Night's Dream work, where Puck, the fairy, was mischievously playing his pranks at the expense of so much individual happiness, the little village of Stoke kept on the even tenour of its way.

There were vestry meetings to occupy the Rector, and tea parties to amuse the ladies—some of these even, in honour of the Captain, assuming the character of the *thé dansante*; and one of these notes even made so bold a dash as to announce, “Mrs. Nettlethorp at home.” “And



the best place for her," was the reply it in many quarters elicited.

Still, all were equally anxious to do the honours to one who had so well renowned himself in foreign lands; for he bore his laurels so meekly, and assumed so little on the confessed beauty of his appearance, that all were prepossessed in his favour.

The Rectory young ladies took a prominent place among the *belles* of Stoke; indeed, no *réunion* would have been complete without them. It was observed that Miss Lonsdale looked thoughtful and somewhat dejected, and they did not wonder at it, as denoting and substantiating a foregone conclusion.

Mr. Carsfield kept himself away; and no wonder, even here. The Captain was sufficient to cut any old Lothario out in a young lady's estimation. So they watched the *belle* and the *beau, par excellence*; and were almost provoked to discover nothing but friendship and a good under-



standing between them. They watched even Miss Fanny, to see if she were doing the sly, and demurely undermining the influence of her cousin. But no, the welfare of the parish and its business was her occupation; and to carry out its views, she seemed equally glad to dance with Mr. Bramley, as she was with the Captain.

And surely this Captain was "the cynosure of wandering eyes;" aye, and of old ladies too who had left their spectacles at home: stiff and fastidious as they were—we mean the old single ladies—he seemed to be able to twist them round his finger; such was the benign influence of his sunny smile, shining on all, and appearing to make no distinction; both old and young came under its influence.

Minnie and Fanny seemed, with the best understanding between them, somewhat to hold him at bay; but knowing, as indeed he himself proclaimed, that he was a marrying man, all the rest of the young ladies would have had him by



dozens. To him it was like choosing the sweetest flower from the midst of a basket of roses. He was almost provoked with their smiles ; he had no patience with their thus taking his merit for granted. He wished they were all as estimable and as candid as Minnie, for in his admiration of her character, it seemed to him more flattering to be rejected of her than to be selected by the million.

Among so much favour shown, it was a puzzle for him to know what exactly pleased him best ; and in his dilemma—his *embarras de richesse*—he was glad at one of these parties to seek repose in doing the civil to the plain Miss Dashwood—a young lady proverbially plain—but so amiable ! was always added as a redeeming point.

“ She is plain ! ” he confessed to himself, as he made an approach, “ ill-fa’red ” as the Scotch call it ; “ and she has no idea of the luck in store for her.”

His stride had now nearly brought him to where she sat. Yet there was no simpering, or extra



fanning. She looked happy and collected—fixed—planted—spared the excitement of hope and fear—a spectator, rather than one of the *corps de ballet*. Still she had danced with the doctor and the lawyer, for she lived with an aunt, who was to them both a good patient and a good cient. The two disposed of, she was left to her female friends, who evidently seemed delighted in her original remarks and clever society.

“Amiable!” the Captain repeated to himself, as he came in her vicinity; “that is what they say of her. What do they mean? Now, can any one so plain, lay claim to any one single point of attraction?” His heart almost failed him; she looked so oddly unconcerned. But he was too near to retreat, so he determined to explain his errand; and he asked her, in a careless manner, for the quadrille was quickly being formed, “if she would like to dance with him?”

“Like,” she repeated, “is such an odd term. I do not think I shall like it at all.”

“What do you mean?” he asked, staring at



her; "not like to dance, or do you object to me as a partner?"

"You took me by surprise, Captain Lethbridge; my meaning is, I do not like to feel myself a *pis aller*—a stop gap merely; I like to dance with those I know."

The Captain bowed as a second sort of introduction; to which she replied, with a pleasant way of assuring him,

"Oh! yes, quite right. A quadrille to us wall flowers is a pleasant sort of journey, the little episode of the evening; therefore, how much more agreeable to take it with those we know. I have made a long story of it, Captain Lethbridge, but I have simply answered your question, 'If I should like to dance with you?'"

Captain Lethbridge had addressed an ugly girl—an amiable one, as he was told—but she had replied to him so oddly straightforward, that he saw nothing of this vaunted qualification. But what surprised him even more than her



frankness was, that as she spoke a bright radiance illumined the most touching eyes in the world ; and a laugh, not to be depressed, danced in their corners, and played in dimples round a superlative set of teeth. And there was with this, an air of serenity and quietude he rarely saw in the young ladies it was his pleasure to accost. There was no quick movement made to secure his arm, and to take him at his word ; nor, as he found, to retain it at the conclusion of the dance. The promenade was shortened, the conversation ceased, and, with a graceful courtesy, and no more "last words," she quietly took her seat.

The Captain felt *hors de combat* ; he had never been used to be shaken off in that manner, and she had said, "Thank you," as he released her from his arm. And it was such an odd thing to say ; and as he repeated it to himself, it sounded, as he muttered it, "so confounded equivocal."

His friend Bramley was the first to jest with him as to his taste, adding, as a sort of apology,



"She is supposed to be rich; or rather her aunt is, and that is much the same thing."

"Riches—yes," said Lethbridge, evidently thinking of something else; "all very excellent in its way. It would replenish the kit, and secure a first-rate berth. But that is all, my friend. I want a wife—a soldier's wife—no fussing—no nonsense—one who would follow my fortune, and think little of her own. It may sound premature, but I rather like that girl; and her name is Rosa. She is not elaborately got up; she is not one of your flirts, decked out to the nine! I felt, as I talked with her, as though I had lived with her all my life. And when she did speak, which was not much, what she said was always new and agreeable; she seemed, as it were, one with myself. Oh! how delicious to tumble asleep unawares, and to hear her pretty voice prattling on; a sweet halo breathes over my heart from the bare idea."

Bramley, in their walk home, laughed at his



friend. He could not help it; it seemed such a myth to him—a waste of sense—to be serious over such an affair of the moment, especially as Lethbridge had lately affirmed that he meant to take a single berth for his passage back to India, and renounce all sensibilities.

“I suspected how it might be,” said Bramley; “and with all your independent talk, it seems you are not yet out of the wood. The marriage ring will yet make part of your kit—a happy part, I daresay. I am, I confess, hard of belief; for Minnie Lonsdale has made me fastidious in my taste. Rosa Dashwood is not handsome, certainly.”

“I am not so sure of that,” replied the Captain, still in a moody state of meditation; “and, besides, man, my furlough is coming to its end; but, with Rosa for my wife, it would only just begin—India, any place, all the same—

““Our hearts be our country, where'er we may roam!”



All this has given quite a turn to my ideas ; for Minnie, as you call her, had quite damped my candle. I feel quite a different man, and prepared to laugh merrily at my aunt, who is always telling me that I had better go back and work out my time, just as though she were speaking to a felon, undergoing penal servitude ; and so, by gad ! it is. And then she goes on to say, she will find me a Mistress Sutable by the year I return. All very well, my dear aunt ; but if I can do my own work better still."

"Then you give up all chance of Minnie Lonsdale and her cousin?"

"I do ; a poor chance at best. Miss Minnie's affections engaged ! Miss Fanny's affections engaged ! A pretty dodge, forsooth, to wait for these young ladies ! Miss Minnie pining for the old Presbyterian, and Miss Fanny evidently in love with you. I think I can do better ; and though you may say, as the fox with the grapes, ' *Ils sont vert,*' I repeat I may do better. I begin



to wonder how you have all allowed Miss Rosa Dashwood to remain single; it shows how seldom a prophet, or even a tidy girl, is honoured in her own country."

"There are certainly many worse persons going than Rosa Dashwood. We have always appreciated her, but she has never dazzled any of us in this way before. I suspect this is the 'fatality' you have heard of—the 'destiny,' 'the wife in the closet,' and sure to come out in due season. Well—well, old fellow, I wish you every success, and see nothing to interfere with it, but the dragon of an aunt, the doctor, and the lawyer."

But Captain Lethbridge was not to be laughed out of his preference; he even grew broody upon it, and settled how both his schemes, as his eggs might be hatched. And there was a lull in the parties for a time; and he was glad to give himself up to the Rector for a day, and make one in a trip down to Dartmouth.



## CHAPTER XIII.

How true it is that restless and disconsolate hearts always wish to be upon the move. Minnie had every day planned work at home, hoping, at least, that Mr. Carsfield would pay her father a morning visit. She wished to see the effect her refusal had had upon his feelings towards her. She thought she could tell in a glance whether his heart was closed against her—whether, in the way of his religious tenets, she had done harm rather than good. She felt that, thinking more of her own objections than of him, she had not



said half enough ; and now there was no opportunity.

As she pondered over her needle, she thought how eloquent she could be ; the words came in soft persuasion to her lips. Where he but near her, she would tell of light from darkness, of good from evil, brought to the believer by the Almighty power ; and how all things, if we will not refuse the good they bring, are messages of love, replete with blessings.

Why had he taken her rejection so ill ? And why had she pined over the decision she had made ? " It is so hard to set matters right," she admitted to herself.

" Oh ! be sure of this," she added, with an effort to shake off her gloom, " all things are miseries whilst we count them so."

Then came the fear that she had been overbearing and positive—that instead of bending the heart of proud and stubborn man, she had only stiffened his inflexibility of judgment, and



strengthened his hatred of conviction. How was it possible that a man such as Mr. Carsfield should even for a moment admit that he was wrong? It was not likely, and hope died within her. A scholar such as he to be talked to by a girl! Was it presumption in her to feel so strong in herself, to think that she could assuredly talk him out of his unbelief? There was a solemn shake of her head as she concluded,

“If ever it is done it is the Lord’s own doing.”

But it was sad to sit at home and wait to see him in vain; so when the Rector proposed the trip to Dartmouth, Minnie was the most ready to accept it.

And Fanny—what were her views on the subject? She had had much to think of and to ponder over. If Minnie could please Bramley, why should she, brought up in the same school and of the same blood, despair of doing so also? It then became her to try and imitate



Minnie, to emulate her heavenly mildness, to tame down the pertness of her own tongue, to succour the poor in their afflictions, and above all to visit the parish school more sedulously than ever. Her heart was one of the restless ones, and was running from itself; so she decided the school should be her first care. Books were collected and arranged in a dainty little basket, and some knitting to teach the girls. So she set off, in a pouring rain, feeling somehow that the very attempt to be useful made her more worthy of succeeding Minnie in a good man's affections. Her shawl was wet, so she took it off. The teachers were few, scholars even more scarce; but turning the six classes into two, it did very well. The Curate was not there, so she had to open the school by reading prayers, and her voice faltered through them, for whenever the door creaked on its hinges, as some lagging child stole in, she thought it might be Mr. Bramley. And it was so unusual a sight to see her there and alone



that she almost felt some explanation, if not apology, were necessary.

However, she was soon engaged in the task she had set herself. The children were pretty and clean, and drawing their forms nearer and nearer, they sat at last so close together that one little scholar was left out.

"Jessie, why don't you cuddle in, too?" asked one of the girls.

Fanny smiled in spite of herself; and the children were noisy and rude, notwithstanding their desire to hear her read.

"Why don't you give them a smack?" said a little quiet girl by her side.

Fanny could not attempt this, but she threatened them with bad marks, and this had the effect of sobering them.

Then came the preparation for Confirmation, and one of the girls simply asked,

"Teacher, where am I to find the vulgar tongue in the Prayer Book?"



And then there was an inquiry for a little sick girl that used to visit the school. She was quiet and well behaved, and Fanny missed her among the present lawless little set. It was no wonder to her that the lower orders were rude and boisterous, whilst witnessing such boldness and such bad bringing up in their children. It put the romance of teaching at an end ; and Fanny was glad to turn to the school-mistress and ask for Jenny Potter, the quiet little cripple.

Jenny Potter was dead. She had received an accident in early youth by a fall from a chair, and though her cheeks were rosy and her laugh merry, yet her little head used to hang listlessly on her shoulder, and there was a fear that she would grow deformed, for her hip was injured, and her limbs seemed withering away.

"Yet even with this," continued the school-mistress, "her delight used to be to come here to learn her letters. Her father would tenderly bring her and place her on a seat, but even this



power of coming ceased ; and she took to sitting all day in her little wooden chair close by the fire at home ; still even there, following up her spirit of usefulness, making the most of 'the day of small things,' and doing what she could heartily.

"My cousin knew her well," interrupted Fanny.

"She did, Miss," said the school-mistress, "and was indeed very kind to her. And Mr. Carsfield used to supply her with nourishments, for the doctor said her strength had need to be kept up. And her strength *was* kept up, Miss, though not in the sense the medical man intended. Jenny Potter, young as she was, led a life of faith. She could not have experienced what it was, she was too little for that, but she felt it."

Now Fanny knew well all the touching history of this little girl, and what had been done in the way of comforting her, but she liked to hear the schoolmistress talk her Devonshire *patois*, breaking through her more cultivated mode of speak-



ing ; so her "yes," and "yes" encouraged her on when she paused to collect her pleased recollection.

"It was touching to hear her sing a hymn," continued the schoolmistress, "and the words that pleased her were about daisies and buttercups, and green hills far away. It always seemed to me that she knew of a better place, for those who put their trust in Him. Mr. Bramley, the curate, was well pleased with her, and told her one day she was as a lily of the field, and would be perfected in that day when God makes up His jewels. These were his words, but neither Jenny nor I understand where he got them from."

"But he was very kind to her?" suggested Fanny, pleased that there was some approach to an object of interest. "He helped her, I dare say?"

"No; d'ye know, Miss," replied the schoolmistress, "he does, as it were, more than he can do; so little Fanny was left out."



"And had no help?"

"Oh! yes, Miss; Mr. Carsfield—him is the ever ready helper in time of trouble—his pockets are very deep and his heart very large. There is no end, I sim, to the good that gentlemen does. We have the luck here of kind hearted gentry. They do say that when Mr. Bramley dines, hur has a brown jug by hur side, in which he puts half his meal for the poor."

"And that makes him so thin," suggested Fanny.

"Well, miss, he is so good that perhaps it's a pity there isn't some more of him. They say he's going to marry."

There was a long silence. And it was provoking that the schoolmistress waited for the question to be asked her, ere she explained what more she knew of the matter. But the "who?" was not easy for Fanny to pronounce, so she turned to attend to the lessons of two scholars, who were anxious to be heard their lessons.



"Very well; very nicely said," Fanny remarked, as she returned the first girl her book.

"No, it isn't, teacher; she said it all wrong," was the remark of the other girl, as she then presented her book.

Fanny felt that her mind had been otherwise engaged. There was a movement made of the closing of the school, so, promising them both marks, Fanny left with that sort of worry at her heart, that vexation of thought, that she was only too delighted to hear of the proposed trip, and was one of the first to busy herself the next day in preparations for a sail down the river to Dartmouth.



## CHAPTER XIV.

THE proposal was made, as we have before stated, by the Rector, to set off one morning early, and to go down the river Dart. An advertisement in the "Times" had caught his eye. It was the requiring a register, and he recollected to have seen the name on a moss-grown stone in the wall of St. Petrox Church. He was not an active man, but he had always the desire to do a service. He often wished a little pleasure excursion for them all, but prudence damped the rising energy; now there was the opportunity of blending business with pleasure—perhaps the reverse



way was the best method of putting it. At all events he soon saw he had many partisans, and Bramley, his curate, as a witness to the accurate copy of the certificate, was in point of fact a party concerned.

Now nothing, in everyone's estimate, could equal the beauty of the scenery on the banks of the Dart.

"They have been over-estimated," observed the Rector, "but there is plenty to admire; and we have this season of autumn in our favour—the earth literally loaded with the bounty of Heaven. Dartmouth is a curious old place, and the walk to the mouth, surveying it from the fort that gives to the sea, is really worthy the visits of the lovers of the picturesque."

"And the ghost story," asked Fanny. "Is there not a spot near the Castle called the grave of the unknown?"

"Yes," replied the Rector; "it was the story of my boyish days. The Castle of Gomerock,



which formerly towered on the left bank of the harbour entrance, dealt in some way, I have heard, with the supernatural. There is little remains of the Castle but the square tower, serving as an outwork to guard the chain which was laid across the entrance of the river to protect the haven against the invasions of the enemy."

"And the ghost used to dance along this chain," suggested Fanny, "as gas in our present day helps in illuminations. How pretty to see a light fairy of a ghost gliding along?"

"Where the chain was attached," said Mr. Bramley, "is still to be seen; steps and platforms cut in the rock may still be traced. The ghost, and peace to her bones! is, I hope, laid ere now."

"You do not like ghosts?" asked Minnie.

"No, I do not, Miss Lonsdale. There is a fault somewhere, if the spirit has not done with this earth."

"It is the same," suggested Captain Dash-



wood, "when packing a portmanteau, you find when locked and strapped down, you have left out some principal thing ; it is hard to get it in. And so do these spirits find :

" " Too late—too late ; you cannot enter now."

" But this ghost did enter," said the Rector ; " the bones were found by some labourers in a grave near : the skeleton of a woman, and tradition has it of some lovely and amiable girl who was missed, and no satisfactory account given of her death."

" The long grass concealed the grave," said the boatman ; " but when found, the skeleton was lying on its back, with the head turned, as if resting, just so. The left arm was raised above the head ; and the whole seemed to say there was not much pains taken with the burial."

" And then I suppose the marvellous flew from mouth to mouth. But what was the best



explanation they gave ?" asked Captain Lethbridge.

" Why it sims," said the boatmen, putting his little straw hat on one side his head, " that there was a woman, more than a hundred years agone, who used to frequent the castle ; and some say they do see her now."

" Where ?" asked the two girls, with a fearful screw of their hands, which were locked together. " Where was she last seen ? not on the river, we hope ? Look at that pretty boat-house of Lord Cranstown's ; look at the flicker of light. Dear papa, ghosts are not seen in day light, are they ?"

" No, surely," answered the boatman. " But this ghost was often seen wandering on the cliffs ; and she would wail at night, just as if a sea gull was hurted in the wing. It is a melancholy note, sure, at all times ; and hers was hawful ! whilst these bones were lodging where they was, almost uncovered, it is not to be wondered at, and



"With you," returned the echo.

"Yes; with me, to wit!"

"To wit," said the echo.

"To wit, to whoo, you owl?"

"You owl."

"But I'm dying for love; will the nymph be complying?"

"Complying."

"And the ghost?"

"A host."

"And that's very true," observed the boatman.

"But who knows all this?" asked Mr. Bramley. "Do you think the echo could confirm it?"

"No, your honour; we have drifted from the echo, and she'll be mute till we wake her up on our return. Then you can ask some more questions."

The echo had been a pleasing episode; and as the boat glided along, the beauty of the scenery



was far beyond description. The magnificence of the woods, shelving down in all directions; the deafening roar of the river, when it foamed over the rocks; the grounds of Sharpham, small fishing huts, and a few cottages, diversify the scene. And then the church of Stoke Gabriel, with the pretty villa called Maisonette.

The river had now left its rocky bed, and rolled with becoming majesty, as it approached the sea; but the echo was still the subject of conversation, and Minnie did as she was bid, when her father asked her to sing the pretty ditty that touched upon the subject: and she began,

“Tell me, babbling echo, why  
You return me sigh for sigh;  
When I of slighted love complain,  
You delight to mock my pain.

“Bold intruder night and day,  
Cold, insensate, hence away!  
If you speak but to deceive,  
Come not near me whilst I grieve.”



Her voice was very sweet; she sang simply the air, with no graces or affectations; the words marvellously soft and touching; and with that sweet plaintive introduction, their pathos seemed to excuse and explain the tear that stole through her long eyelashes, looking very like a dewdrop on a rose, as it settled on her cheek.

She took no notice of her own emotion. Bramley looked as though he would have sprung from the seat on which he was lounging, and have sung, *echo fashion*, to her, even on his knees,

“ When I of slighted love complain,  
You—yes, you—delight to mock my pain.”

Captain Lethbridge said, “ By Jove !” and it was not possible to tell for whom the exclamation was intended.

The Vicar saw, or rather felt, they had somehow drifted into shoally water; yet the river was running rapid and pleasant. The boatmen had rather lingered on their oars to hear the song;



and there was a benign expression on their bronzed countenances as they listened.

"There are some extraordinary echoes in Ireland," said the Rector, with a view to turn the conversation.

The Captain saw his drift, and continued,

"Yes; one especially. When you say to it, 'how d'ye do,' it replies, 'very well, I thank you.'"

And Minnie smiled at him a kind smile, and she said, evidently to arouse herself,

"Let us try this wonderful echo when we return. But not wonderful, seeing that in a district so diversified as this—so full of hollows, vales, and hanging woods, it is no wonder that echoes should abound."

"Yet it is difficult to get two syllables," observed Fanny; "quick dactyls succeed the best."

"Naked rocks answer better than hanging woods, or even vales," said Mr. Bramley; "they



have nothing to divert their attention. The voice is, as it were, entangled and embarrassed in the concert, and weakened in the rebound."

"And weather has great influence on the echo," observed the Rector. "We are in luck to-day, under this bright sun and clear atmosphere; a dull heavy moisture breaks and clogs the sound."

"I cannot but fancy it some pained and imprisoned soul," said Minnie, "yearning for fellowship and pining for human sound. I think some of the poets address echo as a woman?"

"Having the last word," said the Captain.

"No, not exactly that; but the imagination must be startled with it. I am no poet, but I feel at this moment I could write volumes about her."

"The wisest man," said the Rector, "need not be ashamed to appear pleased with such a phenomenon; it may lead to subjects of philosophical and mathematical enquiry."



"Virgil talks of the echo," suggested Bramley.

"In pity," interrupted the Captain, "let us have none of those dead worthies, whilst such a living scene of beauty is presented to us. Miss Lonsdale—Miss Ashmore, do let us talk him down! See how the river widens, having the appearance of a lake. Look! and there is another church almost concealed with trees. What a pity that we are not all pastors, to partake of these goodly things! What place is this?" he asked the boatman.

"Dittisham, your honour."

"And whose beautiful place is that, embosomed in its woods?—the house, so prettily modest, peeping at us through the trees?"

"Greenway, as belongs to Colonel Carly-on."

"Carlyon," repeated the Captain.

*"A la manière du lion, quand il se repose."*

And Minnie added,



“ ‘ *A guisa di lion, quand si posa,* ’ so says Dante. It seems you understand French, Captain Lethbridge ? ”

“ Yes, I do ; that is, it was drilled into me before I could pass my military examination, and much good it has done me. I presume it may some day be of use to me, although for the present it lies dormant. ”

“ All acquirements are useful, ” said the Rector ; “ and it is a pity to see young people squander their time, and thereby their talent. ”

“ ‘ If youth would, and if age could ! ’ ”

But youth won’t, and age can’t. ”

“ Never mind, my dear uncle, ” said Fanny, affectionately stroking his ungloved hand, as it rested on the side of the boat ; “ Rome was not built in a day, and it is not given to all to go to Corinth. ”

“ No, Miss Fanny ; but surely we might make some nearer advance to it. ”



The harbour of Dartmouth now opened before them ; the old town of Kingswear, and the woods of Mount Boon, the seat of Sir Henry Seale. There was the Castle of Dartmouth commanding the entrance ; the limestone quarries pleasantly mixing with the wooded slopes, and autumn shewing here and there amid the green leaf her golden tinge.

“What is supposed to be the length of the Dart?” asked Captain Lethbridge.

The boatman, as is usual on a point of calculation, put his little straw hat aside, and scratched his head.

“Why, from its rise at Cranmere Pool, on Dartmoor, to the point where it falls into the sea, at the mouth of the harbour, it is carkilated to go over a course of about forty miles.”

“But we have not come forty miles?”

“Lor ! blessee, your honour, when you boarded at the bridge at Totness, you left the rapid Dart on the other side. This is the navigable Dart, a



harbour for ships, and for the weary and worn sailor, in the time of a storm."

"Well, and now we must order our march," said the Rector, as they were steering the boat to the quay stairs. "Bramley and I are on business, recollect; the girls have a few visits to pay, and you, *Monsieur le Capitaine*, what will you do, till we meet at two, to lunch at the Castle Inn?"

"Why cannot he come with us?" asked Bramley. "Surely if two witnesses are good, three must be even better still?"

And so it was agreed.

"But let us, papa," said Minnie, "first meet at the fort overlooking the sea. It is near where your old stone in the wall reposes, and we can then mount to the Gallant's Bower—there is something so pretty in the name; and to the Compass Field, and to the ruins of Castle Gomerock; our visits will soon be got over. What a day of joy this is!"



And Bramley, seeming to have learnt a lesson from the echo, repeated, "this is!"

But she was tripping off with her cousin ; she gave one little kiss of her hand to her father, ere she turned a sharp angle of the Custom House steps, and was then out of sight. The Captain took out his cigar case and fusee box ; the Rector and Mr. Bramley saw that they had their pencils and paper, and their visiting cards.

"For we must do the polite," they both agreed, "first take the particulars from the stone in the churchyard, and then pay our visit to the Pastor of the parish."



## CHAPTER XV.

THE old town of Dartmouth is very foreign in its appearance. The houses are built with projecting fronts, carved oaken brackets, and antique gables. It reminds a stranger of the hanging gardens of Babylon, so abrupt is the acclivity of the hill on which the town stands, that from the level of the houses in the upper street you can almost look down the chimneys of those in the street below. There are two lines of streets, one above the other, which are approached by stone steps at various steep openings.

It was beautiful from the height to see the



variety of shipping in the harbour ; a harbour so capacious that 500 sail of large vessels can ride there in safety ; entering without risk, with no bar or rocks to intercept the passage. It was here the fleet destined for the Holy Land assembled in 1190. Wool, wine, and iron constituted its commerce in the days of Edward I. Dartmouth is one of the quarantine ports of the Channel. It sustained a month's siege during the civil wars against Prince Maurice, and surrendered in 1643. It was subsequently stormed and carried by Sir Thomas Fairfax.

Yet with all this ancient tradition, the floating bridge seemed to the two cousins as they mounted the heights, the lion of the place : they saw carriages, as it were, swimming over the river, with a sort of gipsy tent, their only *chaperonage*.

"And there," said Fanny, pointing to the mouth of the harbour, "is the little St. Petrox Church, to which we are to bend our course. How pretty it stands, sheltered by that old castle ruin



and the wall that rises above it. It is in the stone fence that skirts the graveyard that we are to find the old moss-covered stone, bearing the name that it seems the family are seeking for. Who would have thought that my dear uncle's eyes were so sharp, or his memory so good?"

"And who would have dreamt of such a pleasant day?" said Minnie, her spirits rising with the change of scene. "With all due respect to our friends, let us curtail our visits as much as we can, and hasten to the fort. As we have made no appointment, I trust that we may find everybody out."

The Curate and his friend were as keen upon getting over their work as the two girls.

The old Rector seemed to know every one he passed. A "how do?" here and a shake of the head there, and "I ought to know that face," much delayed their progress. Still there was time with the two friends for some interchange of thought and opinion.



“By Jove!” commenced the Captain, “what a pleasant morning we have had. I took it as a *pis aller*, which means the worst coming to the worst—just making out the time. I left Tottenness with Rosa Dashwood raging in my head. And now wonder not at your love, nay, our love for the angelic Minnie. How pretty she looks—how neat in all the appointments of her dress—her extreme modesty—her manners. And then, as soon as she was bid, the entrancing song she sung! and with that soul-thrilling voice of hers, she never seemed to suppose for a moment that she was an object of admiration.”

Bramley seemed to give a ruffle of his feathers altogether as he replied—

“‘When I of slighted love complain,  
You delight to mock my pain.’”

Fancy that soul-subduing creature singing such a song as that! And I believe from my heart she feels it, and yet she seems happy in her own quiet way; always calm, contented, and placid; no-



body can tell what she is thinking of ; she is as inscrutable as the sea in the distance."

"And this, I suspect," interrupted the Captain, "is the secret of her inexhaustible interest. We know not whether she is shallow or deep. I sometimes fancy there are faint gleams of subdued sarcasm in her gentle eyes."

"Say rather," said Bramley, interrupting in his turn, "you see a serene intelligence there dwelling apart from the world. There is something at times most sad and touching in her looks—a simple earnestness, a surrender of self up to some care, some wear and tear of sorrow ; her beauty can never be impaired, but I fancy the bloom of her cheek is not so bright as it has been. I cannot but suspect that old Unitarian has much to do with it."

"I wish we had him here to duck him," said the Captain ; "we would make him confess. Truth, they say, lies in a well. We would find if the sea did not suit our purpose. And Fanny?"



"Oh! her best charm is, that she duly seems to appreciate her cousin."

And now they had halted at a high red mansion, also hanging on the hill side—steps to ascend to the garden, and steps again to the house.

The Rector of the parish was at home; and after an appointment made to search the old church books at a stated hour in the afternoon, the luncheon ordered at the Castle Inn, and the trio again set off on their walk to the fort.

Still it was a long walk, for the Rector had much to say about everything as he passed. To him it all seemed classic ground. He could not forget the place of importance that Dartmouth had once been. He pointed out the square tower on the other side the river. He went over again the long story of the chain, and that in the olden time there was money appropriated to find one in length and strength to be lain across the mouth of the haven from one tower to the other.



The Captain was quite aware of it.

"But how did you know?" asked the Rector.

"Why, it seems, sir, you gave us the account about two hours ago."

Now they were at Warfleet, where the lime kilns are positioned at the end of the creek. And all this gave rise to many more suggestions. Yet still they were nearing St. Petrox, and Bramley knew full well that the fort, their place of rendezvous, was within a stone's throw of the grave yard.

Minnie and her cousin were the first to reach the platform, and they walked up and down more charmed than ever at its position. They felt out at sea, as it were, and they sang—

"The careful watch patrols the deck  
To guard the ship from foes or wreck."

They sang the words in concert, and their voices were very harmonious. They then looked down into the romantic creek, some fathoms deep below,



and then to the castle walls towering above their heads.

"Who goes there?" continued Minnie, from her song.

"Not the ghost?" asked Fanny, in a tremulous sort of voice.

It was pretty to see the two girls in the romantic position in which they stood—the guns looking so like war—their pretty straw hats, with their coloured feathers, looking so like love.

"Why did you say, 'who goes there,' Minnie? It was really enough to startle me."

"Well," said Minnie, "who does go there?"

It was soon explained. Mr. Carsfield was visiting at one of the houses at which they had called. He saw them from the library window, could not resist the temptation, and had followed them to the fort.

The purport of their unexpected visit was soon explained, and they were waiting for the Rector.

"And we expect them every minute," said Fanny.



"Who are they?" asked Mr. Carsfield.

But the gentlemen explained themselves. They turned the corner into the fort; and the delight of the Rector to see his good friend Carsfield did for all the rest—there was no further need of any manifestations of joy.

The Captain exclaimed, "By Jove!" once or twice to himself, but there was so much to see and admire that the coolness of the reception in some quarters did not strike upon the interloper. Minnie felt subdued, but she did her best to throw Mr. Carsfield with the rest of the party. We are all in a measure influenced by scenery, and the magnificence of the view seemed to expand her ideas into the belief that they must all be of one faith—God's creatures here below! This was decidedly no place for doubts or shortcomings. There was a reverence of their heads as they watched the sea lashing against the base of the green and moss-covered rock. The expanse of sea altogether gave well the idea of eternity.

"But we must not lose time," said the Rector.



"Now Mr. Bramley, pencil and paper ; and let me collect the witnesses."

They turned the sharp corner of the stone fort, and were then in the burial ground, which seemed as a pathway round the castle, to the extreme end, finishing in the fort.

"I wish to go up to the old stone in the wall, unprepared," said the Rector ; "I have my credentials, and I desire to see how we agree."

It was a little stone tablet at the entrance from the church.

"SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF  
BETSY . . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . . ."

The stone was covered with moss, but after a little trouble, the Rector soon saw that the advertisement and the tablet both agreed.

"To be of use is something," said the Rector ;  
"I hope my information may not be misapplied.  
Peace to poor Betsy's manes ! She has chosen a



pleasant berth here, high and dry, her life storms and trials all passed. Let us take a lesson ; the tide which day by day dashes against this rocky beach puts to us a question, in its restless, busy motion. Each crested wave comes onward in its full force, and falls back again ; but it has done its work before it bursts on the rock below, with its whitening surf. Yes, inch by inch it comes on, and so with the soul. There may be relapses, many fallings back from infirmity and want of faith ; and yet a progress that resolves to try again and again, advancing, we will hope, daily, to the shores of the eternal rock."

The Rector liked the sound of his own voice, and an inspiration seemed to him to have come to his words, and he longed to jot down what he had said ; but the girls had both nestled to his side. They each took an arm, and said they had meditated quite long enough among the tombs. Vain was it for the Rector to make another effort to continue his discourse. The watches were 11



out in evidence the luncheon must be ready, and the tide would not serve them if they did not keep their appointment with the boat.

"And friend Carsfield, you must come with us?" said the Rector.

"No, only to the entrance of the town," he replied; "my friends I am staying with dine early; and I left them so abruptly that they may think I am running a muck to the sea. They know I admire the scenery, but they do not know all I admire. Come, Miss Lonsdale, let us have a chat—a little teaching."

And he drew back as he spoke, and signalled out Minnie. There was a sort of self confidence in what he did, such as a man of position—nay, even of fashion—would have maintained.

"By Jove!" said the Captain.

"Commend me to his assurance," muttered the Curate.

"Carsfield is always friendly," said the Rector.

"Come, Fanny, lend me your arm, and let me



be your *beau*. Let the two fellows amuse themselves, and we will go on as the advance guard."

They had now reached South Town, as it is called; the wilderness was passed, and then came the two bow windows of the house where Mr. Carsfield was located.

"I must see what he is like," said the Captain, taking a circuitous turn through the wood. "Come up here, Bramley, and let us take a parting look at the fort."

But it was not at the fort alone they looked; it was at Mr. Carsfield and the pretty Minnie, walking by his side. They were not very far behind the rector and his niece.

Carsfield's talk was earnest, and there was no attempt made to conceal that he had something to say. His hat was pushed back in an old-fashioned sort of manner, showing his broad and lofty forehead; his form was of middle height, and well set up.



And this was the Unitarian they had talked about—their rival! It was well to see of what stuff he was made; and there was something very pleasant in the quiet expression that beamed from his dark brown eye. The cast of his face was both thoughtful and amiable, with a slight shade of melancholy, as a man who lived more for himself than others, his voice mild and melodious, his manner friendly, and quite free from anything of assumption.

Minnie and her companion were talking earnestly, yet her manner seemed natural and unaffected, calm, as she addressed to him her discourse; and when he spoke there was a sort of rising into warmth—nay, almost impassioned, as the subject seemed to interest him.

“It is a regular case of abduction,” said the Captain.

“And Minnie Lonsdale a consenting party,” responded the Curate.

“Better know the worst,” said the Captain,



with a desperate twirl of his moustache. "For the future I will stick to Rosa Dashwood; and you, Bramley, you had better pair off with Fanny What's-her-name."

And all this had been effected in a moment by honest folks, playing an honest part.

Carsfield had been struck by the Rector's few words. He had come upon the party unexpectedly, and his heart had expanded under the pleasure of seeing the gentle Minnie again. And he said,

"Listen to me, Minnie; unworthy though I am, I have been in good hands since we last met. I cannot understand why you Christians should be so anxious over a poor mortal whom you consider has not yet joined the true fold. Still, it is a fine thing surely, to meet with a man in the plenitude of his religious creed—a giant in spiritual things—a full grown Christian—one with the powers and faculties of the soul endued—armed with superhuman beauty and vigour, and



God giving grace, who will help where He sees a need. And with such an one I am staying now. The tree grows either towards Heaven as a palm tree, with its verdant coronet, or it grows towards earth, full of knots, and gnarled, as the fruit trees, Minnie, in our Devonshire orchards. My friend asks, are we advancing? are we growing? For myself, I am delighted to say, no, I am fast. But your father's words to day, Minnie, seemed to touch upon a stunted soul, that was yearning to live in God's presence. He talked of the soul's infirmity, and that we are drifted as a wreck; still, that there is an onward progress. Don't think this, Minnie, an impulse—a mere excitement of heart. I may have my spiritual impulses, but it is to Minnie I would come as a scholar to show my advancement in Grace. You smile, Minnie, because I am using the term you good people use. We are so near my door, that I have to time for an intermediate term. Do you understand me, Minnie? If you do, then I am



content. There is the slow growth; do you give me credit for the growth in grace?"

"I do," replied Minnie.

The next moment she had joined her father and her cousin.

The certificate of poor Betsy's burial was obtained, the luncheon was soon dispatched, and they were again re-seated in the boat for their return to Totness.



## CHAPTER XVI

WE have lingered over this pleasant trip to Dartmouth, but as time and tide wait for no man, so must we hurry back. The boatmen had grown impatient, for the tide was about to turn; and they saw a laborious pull before them, if the gentle folk would not object to a tug boat, that was going the same course. So the rope was affixed, and the matter soon arranged.

And this seemed to cast a damp over the before cheerful little party. The heavy boat in advance of them took off all their elasticity. Even



the echo was merely a few "good-byes," "*au revoir*," and "Ta-ta," from the Captain.

Bramley sat in a thoughtful mood, muttering some pretty poetry that suited better "the gloomy habit of his soul," than the party by whom he was surrounded.

"And men

Call their lost friends, or mourn unhappy love ;  
The pitying rocks, the mossy caves, return  
Their sad complaints again, and seem to mourn."

"Commend me to your pathos," said the Captain ; "but by Jove ! I shall be glad when we are out of the boat ; the water is getting rough, and I do not like these nut-shells."

"Wait for the next reach, your honour," said the boatman ; "that will take us into calmer water. This is the worst bit of all the river. Many years ago a whole party of fiddlers were drowned here, going to play at a ball at Totness."



"Then, my good fellow, you have at once accounted for the echo!"

They all laughed at the Captain's fanciful conceit; but they were none of them sorry when they parted from the tug boat, and were landed at the steps of the bridge at Totness.

As the Captain and his friend linked their arms one in the other to reach home by a short cut across the fields, thus the silence was broken :

"That old Unitarian!" muttered one.

"That old Unitarian!" responded the other.

"That we should be beat."

"That we should be beat."

"Well?"

"Well?"

"And where is the harm done?"

"Where?" The echo would not have responded better.

This was all very well, but both Bramley and the Captain felt a dullness and a void at heart.



"Come up with me," said Bramley, "and we will talk over our day."

"No; better let it pass, as one of the fleeting things which beguile. You, I repeat, had better think of Miss Fanny and the living. I will go home and arrange my plans touching Miss Rosa."

Captain Lethbridge knew he had no time to spare; so he looked on the trip to Dartmouth, pleasant as it was, as an episode that must not turn him from his project. He thought over his former plans, which this trip to Dartmouth had helped to disturb. He saw now clearly how it was with Miss Lonsdale, so he put her aside as a thing of naught; he could only look upon her as a bright star about, as it were, to eclipse her own light; and how nobly she had dealt by that old Unitarian. If she really did love him, how bravely, and yet how modestly she had met his advance.

Still, according to the old proverb, "There were as good fish in the sea as ever came out of



it;" so he soon talked himself into this change of plan; and with his heart pining for some one to love, he merely had to substitute Rosa Dashwood as its object. The *beau ideal* is set up; a sort of "Aunt Sally," and all the tender missiles are then directed against it; and then he recalled vigorously to his recollection the evening when he and his Rosa had first met, and how strange it was that, *apropos de bottes*, as it were, he should have asked her to dance with him.

And then there were some coincidences to be brought forth, and then he tried to recollect all that she had said; and he with glee admitted to himself that the turn she gave to the commonest conversation was ever fresh and new. It seemed that she was just the wife to cheer up the monotony of bungalow life in the far, far East. She was not handsome, that he was forced to confess; but such as she was, she pleased him. His trip to Dartmouth was very near disarranging all



these tender affinities ; with a jerk of his cheroot, he admitted they had nearly been "all UP, and a dash why !" but, tapping off the embers, it was all better to be settled as it was. So he made a sort of scraping bow to the recollection of the Unitarian, and a mental kiss of the hand to the pretty Minnie, and then his whole skill in tactics was directed to improving his acquaintance with Rosa and her aunt.

There were no more dances on the *tapis* just at that time, but he managed to meet them in their walks, to talk of flowers, to collect some of the choicest, to arrange them as a bouquet with his best taste ; and then to leave them at their gate, with Captain Lethbridge's best compliments.

And days and days passed away in this manner, without his having the courage to ask if they were at home. He was not afraid of Rosa, but he was of her aunt ; and the old butler who replied to the bell looked so cold and uncourteous,



that it seemed to give him a shiver all over, the very idea of addressing him.

Still, he was losing time, and something must be done. So at length he took courage, talking himself into it; he, who had faced so many Sikhs, to take fright at that old mummy's visage! It was ridiculous in the extreme! So he turned upon him one day suddenly, and asked if the ladies were at home? They were; and he was shewn into the room where they were sitting.

They received him with courtesy; and the first awkwardness over, he presented his flowers, making them the stepping stone to propitiate the aunt's good graces. There was much to be said about them; descanting on their various shades, the double and the single. Rosa talked well, and her aunt talked much; and the Captain soon found himself in the pleasantest society he had known since his residence in the neighbourhood.



The flowers discussed, and placed by Rosa in a handsome vase, their next talk, of course, was of India. The aunt thought it a horrible place, a hazardous sort of life for men, and the most listless lassitude for women. The niece seemed to think it depended.

"It is never exactly the place," she said, "but the people in it."

This was balm to the Captain, and he replied,

"Perhaps we have more of comfort than you might expect in our little compounds; and there is more of good fellowship in India than I suspect there is in England. Women are spoilt among us, I can assure you. When we have a ball, we count our 'spinsters,' as we call them, as we would our rarest jewels; for them there is no lack of partners. A bachelor in India is, perhaps, worse off than he is in England."

"Then you do consider it a forlorn case?" said Rosa.



Her aunt quietly suggested that every man shewed his sense by remaining single.

"But single for what, my dear madame?" interrupted the Captain; "that he may sit during the mid-day sulkily at home, with no friend near him but his dog and his cheroot? Man was not made to live alone; he is a more social animal than this. But be that as it may, I have made up my mind never to go back to India a single man."

Rosa laughed outright, and her aunt looked alarmed. It seemed to the latter almost a case of abduction; and she said,

"Softly, my dear sir, softly. You forget all the various *pros* and *cons.*; and seem taking it for granted that every lady would accept you."

"And why not?" the Captain asked, his fine handsome face beaming of hope and love, rather than of pride and assumption. "If I presume that I should make a good husband, why should any girl reject me?"



"O, the country, of course; that is the objection I meant," replied the aunt, who, in her timidity, already anticipated an action for defamation and libel. "It is the country, good sir, I mean. What woman, born in a Christian land, would place herself at the mercy of such a set of barbarians? What do you say, Rosa?" she asked, turning round to her niece as a sort of advocate.

"What do you think, Miss Dashwood?" the Captain also asked, taking from his nosegay a forget-me-not and a pansy.

She received the flowers; her eyes sought the ground, and a bright blush mounted to her cheek, as she answered,

"I can only repeat what I said before; it depends."

"But with a man of your choice?" the Captain asked.

"Oh! all the world over," she replied, and her eyes beamed and looked perfectly beautiful.



"And you would love him?"

"Yes, in my heart of hearts!"

"And you would make him happy, and follow his fortunes?"

"Yes—aye, yes! to the world's end, and even further than that."

"My dear, you are talking nonsense!" said her aunt, with amusing solemnity.

And Rosa laughed, and the Captain laughed; and it was a laugh in unison—a happy laugh, as though they were quite assured of understanding each other.

Music was then proposed, and Lethbridge sang, and Rosa sang. And the duet they selected, though not exactly "Over the hills and far away," yet, with a little stretch of sentiment, well suited the occasion; so that the Captain left his own dear Rosa, as he was pleased to term her, more in love than ever.



## CHAPTER XVII.

THE Curate, in spite of his hermit propensities, felt lonely; for he missed his recently acquired companion and friend, the Captain. The creaky swing of his little garden gate, and the well-known rap at his sitting-room door, became less frequent, and his heart longed for the cheering sound; but it was, alas! now less often than ever. It was apparent to him, judging from a word here, and an absence there, which way the wind was blowing in that quarter. His friend had chanced upon a dearer friend. It was sad, as far as he was concerned; but one going such a



long distance needed a friend. He could not go with him; his duty called him to remain. So he would pray that this new friend might prove a friend—a true friend. He knew that he was praying for Rosa Dashwood; and in the desolate state of his feelings, he wished that Lethbridge had never seen her.

What was there left for him, with his friend gone? There was a vacuity in his heart; and he looked round to count what he had, and there was but little. There was the Rectory, it was true; but what was that? Minnie dead, as it were; Fanny nothing.

His heart yearned for something; and then it recollected there was still his old friend, the Rector. He felt the heart's longing, and the desire therein placed, for something to love and to care for! And how much will not this human heart endure? what trouble, hardship, and perplexity will it not go through for an object of adoration?



It has been wisely said, that the heart which deliberately clings to self, cannot for its very life receive or admit a generous and disinterested kindness. If it does, it becomes itself generous ; it must cast out self to admit this kindness. Bramley was weary of himself and everything relative to self ; and he thought, with something like envy, of the new and happy state of existence to which his friend, the Captain, had brought himself. Not that he admired either Rosa or her aunt ; but Bramley wanted social intercourse and the congenial temperature of kindly feeling ; and this he looked round in vain to find in his hill-side solitary dwelling.

His house was picturesque, certainly ; it seemed pitched on that mountain side in the way of the hermits of yore—a leaving of earth and earthly things, as it were, to be purer and nearer to Heaven. How the material of timber and stone had reached so high a point in its erection, was a marvel ! For the rest, with the



exception of his little *parterre*, and the potatoe plot, still climbing up the hill; the bright ever blooming gorse was left undisturbed.

And there were craigs of rock protruding, covered with lichen, and all that close sort of creeping plant that grows unmolested on the hill-side. And Bramley felt himself something like that cold creeping sort of plant, clinging to his rock—his cold hard rock—and with nothing aught beside. Even his friend Lethbridge had found a kindred heart; whilst he himself had turned sulky and morose, because the heart he coveted could not make any response to his own.

He felt ashamed of the brooding humour in which he had indulged, and he tried to shake it off. He talked kindly to his old servant, and spoke cheerfully to his dog—his faithful Charlie. And then he moodily settled that Charlie was all very well, the old woman a decided bore, and that he must seek further and arouse himself ere his heart—aye, and his head, too,—decidedly became a lump of ossification, and nothing better,



He looked out from his window ; the Rectory and its broad land lie in the bird's eye view beneath him. There was no reason, because he wanted more, that he should seemingly neglect the kind friends he therein possessed, and who were always so glad to see him. So he determined to act up to the reality of the thing ; to put aside from his mind the bright dream he had aspired to ; to divorce himself from the beguiling hope he had nurtured so long ; to divest himself of the sweet burden of his heart's affection, leaving no link—no cord, and go forth as one who looked not beyond the amusement of the present moment.

So he took pains with his toilet that morning ; whistled to his dog, caught up the "Quarterly Review," boldly dashed down the hill, and as one running from himself, and with a beating heart from exercise and too much thought, presented himself at the Rectory door.

It was the first time he had been there since his rejection and disappointment, and it seemed



an age ago. He had left there all hope of his first love—or ought so to have done. And we all know what this first love is—its pure and unselfish charm—the heart given up to one object, where lie concentrated the deepest and truest affection. Time may fling a dark cloud of reality over this summer scene of the heart, the world may sour these sweets and blunt these keen emotions. The day may come when we account it as a dream, and confess with a sigh that life has had nothing else so sweet to offer us.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

"MR. BRAMLEY, you are quite a stranger," rang cheerily from all the voices of the busy working party as the Curate entered their sitting-room. Even the younger members of the community crowded round him, wondering where he had been all this very long time. They had a hundred things to show him and to tell him. The cat had had kittens—such lovely little things—and there was a new brood of ducks ; one of the girls had fallen off her pony, but was not a bit hurt.

It was pleasant, he felt, to be mixed up in the news of all these things, and to have been missed, and now to have been so unfeignedly welcomed.



Minnie received him with a complacent mildness, an impressive yet kindly steadiness—a manner that explained to him at once that she was his friend and well wisher, whilst he allowed these feelings of friendship to content him.

Fanny took no pains to conceal her pleasure; asking him over and over again where he had been and what he had been doing since their pleasant trip to Dartmouth? and concluding by saying,

“We were so glad when Sunday came round, for then we saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears that you were still in the land of the living. Had you a passion for solitude?”

No, indeed he had not; and he had found out that nothing was so detestible as too much of self. And he now understood the extent of the punishment, the cruel interdict of solitary confinement. And then he rubbed his hands with unrestrained glee, and protested he felt as one returned from penal servitude.



"But your friend," asked Minnie and Fanny in a breath, "Captain Lethbridge?"

"Friend indeed! He has proved a reed at best. Have you not heard that he is engaged to Miss Rosa Dashwood? There he spends his days, and needing, I suppose all his breath to cool his flame, my hill side residence is neglected. Yes, yes, that is the break up my friendship has had; and I may well say with Sancho Panza, 'no more 'pears out of that pot.' When we do meet, he can talk of nothing but his beautiful Rosa."

"I am glad," said Minnie, "that the Captain has set his affections on one so worthy as Miss Dashwood; but it is rather a *façon de parler* to call her lovely. She is surely anything but that."

"It matters not; my worthy friend is in love; and there is a power consequent in love that adorns the object so preferred with all the attractive qualifications that poets dream of. He will have become used to a plain face when he awakens to the reality."



"But she is amiable, and agreeable, and kind hearted," observed Minnie.

"She may be; but I could not love her, for all that," said Bramley.

"Nobody wants you to love her," rejoined Fanny. "Captain Lethbridge would not thank you for such a stretch of complaisance. If he is happy that is enough. But fancy taking Miss Rosa Dashwood all the way to India!"

"I do not think there is any pretence in the passion he professes for her. His furlough has nearly expired. He has to take out troops, and the ship cannot wait. You do not seem to envy the young lady, Miss Fanny?"

"Indeed I do not," she replied, her looks beaming the truth of her assertion. "I would not leave this dear old Rectory—this happy village—for all the wealth of the East; or even such a husband as Captain Lethbridge; and besides which, it must be confessed that he has never asked me."



The Rector joined in the general laugh at her candid and spontaneous assertion.

"He did not come to me, Fanny, to choose him a wife," said the Rector, "or I would have selected you, my dear little girl, as one fitted in your love of duty as well as to become a captain's wife as a parson's. You love our church, Fanny, even to its very steeple. All very well, my dear, to so draw out your own line of liking; but in the carrying it out you may have to go further and fare worse. It is a pity ever to make to yourself a *beau ideal*. Your fate may take you quite a different course to that which your wishes point."

"Then I shall cry my eyes out," said Fanny.

"No, you will not, my dear girl," kindly observed the Rector; "be your path scattered with flowers, or be it the difficult and thorny road, blessed with contentment, health, and a tranquil conscience, you will not soon forget the lessons taught you in your youth, your responsibilities,



or your duties in that state of life to which it may please God to call you. Be he who he may, you will be a treasure to any man; so let the Captain go his way, blessed with the object of his choice. I will promise you the first stray parson I find; and if my good word will be of any use to you in the getting him, I promise it you with all my heart."

There is many a true word spoken in jest. The Rector looked on Bramley as little better than an old woman, and little dreamt that his casual though truthful words in respect to Fanny should make on his mind the slightest impression.

But the curate was entering on a new epoch of his life, in which his sentiments and his affections all promised to take a new course. The effect of the Rector's words seemed to possess a peculiar power over him, awakening him, as it were, to new hopes and to new affections; the bright dawn of a happy day was about to cheer him on?



He felt all the kindness of his friends in their reception of him at the Rectory—that peaceful spot undisturbed by the discord of the world. He felt the harmony of Minnie's presence, and he felt more than this, that he who had thought himself an isolated being was basking in Fanny's good will. He recollected how the bantering words of his friend the Captain, and the very supposition of their truth, filled up a vacuum of his heart; and he repeated the lines of Pope—

“ Not loving first, but loving wrong, is shame.”

If the gentle Fanny did love him he could only consider himself the happiest of men.

The Rector seemed to have opened the little chink which let in a great light—a sunbeam, a ray of joy to the poor curate in his dreariness and solitude of heart.

His memory began to retrace a long gone back story of Fanny's kindness to him, and Fanny's patience and forbearance. He delighted in the



secret confession of his own faults, and his own hardness of heart.

Then followed the impression of newly awakened sympathies. Minnie had given him up, the Captain had given him up; Fanny, he saw, was still his own—he could not mistake it—in prosperity, in adversity, in sickness and in health, in trouble and in joy. And so he trusted it would be, until the shadow of years fell longer and longer across the threshold, until the sun of life was set.

And so he talked himself into the full knowledge that Fanny loved him, and had long evinced this gentle preference. He felt conscience stricken, for he knew he was not suffering now from a false spirit of delusion, grasping at a vapour. No; this was a reality, a startling fact; and in his simplicity he required to know, in his growing affection, how long it might be before he could go to her and truthfully proclaim that her love was returned.



When he did speak to her, words were wanting to express what he felt ; but her heart pleaded for him more eloquently than the most practised tongue. And she said,

“ I wonder you, who are so eloquent in the pulpit, cannot express yourself better now.”

He quietly replied,

“ Speech, Miss Fanny, is but a poor thing when we are in earnest.”

And Bramley was in earnest ; and Fanny soon saw that whatever the flights of his heart might have been, it was hers now, and hers only.

She had witnessed his regard for her cousin, and in her own love for her dear Minnie, nothing would have pleased her better than their union. But the tide of events had turned. She heard what he said, and was afraid. But perfect love casteth out fear, and she promised herself that she would become worthy of his love—emulate him in his deeds of charity, comfort the sick, and alleviate the sorrowing in heart. And above all,



she promised herself she would put his rook's nest to rights, and make it tidy and a more worthy habitation for the true heart that it contained.

And so Fanny was all joy and felicity.

"With caution judge of possibilities;  
Things thought unlikely, e'en impossible,  
Experience often shows us to be true."

"And it is true," she would say to herself;  
"he has told me that he loves me."

Still, she could hardly believe the happy beating of her heart. She seemed to be living a new life. She was up betimes in the early dawn, for her heart was too light, too buoyant, to slumber. She might have said, "I sleep, but my heart waketh." She saw the sun rise bright in its glory; never had it looked so transcendently bright to her before. It was the reflection of her own happiness.

"Cheerfulness is the dowry of the dawn."

And Fanny said to herself that her heart was



as light as a bird's, that never seems to sleep. But as she bustled about and arranged her uncle's writing table for him, she thought of the dear old Rector's kindness to her, and the happy home to her his home had ever been ; and great big tears rolled down her cheeks, for serious thoughts followed close upon her joy ; when she reflected that she was about to give up this home, and all the daily kindness of those she loved so well. And that she must take her little income with her, also assumed the form of a trouble.

Fanny was a ward in Chancery, and though just of age, yet she knew that her money, passing through her uncle's hands, paying him handsomely for the home he gave her and requiring so little of her income for herself, must be of use to him in his yearly expenditure ; the narrowness of his gains, keeping so little pace with the liberality of his heart.

And then she had the fears that her uncle might object to her engagement, and that Minnie even



would think better of the treasure she was giving up. Already she felt a world of care in the dread that him she loved might be taken from her. Then she began to reassure herself. No—it could not be undone. No hand of man could separate—could cancel their mutual vow. Bramley had asked her to be his ; and she had consented.

And Minnie, coming down to breakfast, soon put aside these nervous fears ; pressing her cousin to her heart, she said,

“ My dear Fanny, I am indeed happy for your sake. I never was so glad in my life. Patient, waiting, trusting Fanny ! May God bless you in your married career, and crown you both here and hereafter with everlasting joy.”



## CHAPTER XIX.

THE report was soon whispered in the gossiping village of Stoke, that the two young ladies at the Rectory were both engaged to be married—Miss Lonsdale to the Curate, and Miss Fanny to the handsome Captain, whose intention was to take her over sea directly. It was also settled by the *on dits* that the Rector had consented to give up his living immediately to the young couple. They thought this was hard upon the old pastor, and a pity that he should take the bread out of his own mouth, whilst he had still health and strength to need it.



Of course all these confabulations were not long in the small range of that peaceful valley, ere they came round to the ears of the Unitarian gentlemen in the red brick mansion, the walls of which, in their substantial thickness, and standing alone in that stately domain, might have been supposed to have shut him out from all the pain of gossip. It found him sitting peacefully enough in his roomy arm-chair, in the midst of his books and papers; for, as we have said, he had taken more to literature of late, and he was often engrossed with theological argument and disputations on divinity, tracing the course of mysterious dogmas, and interested—very interested—in the smallest evidence he could glean, with his finite knowledge of Christianity and revealed religion.

And yet the more he read, the more he was beginning to question his own wisdom; and even to ask, as he pondered over divine lore, what was the best knowledge, at its best? There was a



deep and solemn shake of his head, as he admitted it was merely an empty vapour, that passes away ; whilst the soul—the vital part of man—exists for ever.

Then what were costly gifts in the way of talent or of genius ? and how to be prized and valued in their use ?

“And what use ?” he asked.

And here he paused, and several mighty tomes were closed ; and Minnie’s book, the Bible, placed near him instead.

“What,” he repeated, “is the learning of man, compared to the immensity of God, who taketh up the isles as a very little thing ?”

And yet, with all this occupation, this being taken from worldly things, he was bored by the news—this everlasting gossip—that Miss Lonsdale was engaged to be married ; and, above everything, to the Curate. This might look likely, but his heart told him it was no such thing. He could not forget the last day he had



seen her at Dartmouth, and the tender recollection it gave him. He knew that she was not engaged; had she not, as it were, accepted his words; and he now had his own probation to work out with sincerity and truth, before he could proclaim to the world that she was his and his only—one with him in spirit and in truth.

He had begun to see everything in a new light—himself, his past life, and his present state. Neither would he deceive himself. This was oft-times repeated, he now saw the glimmer of eternity and God's revealed truth.

At first a glimmer, but as he nursed it steadily, it became the ray of peace and holiness—peace which he had not conceived before—holiness far beyond his former aspirations. Still, he would not yet trust himself.

“It is her living and loving earnestness,” he said, “which is likely to win the heart; and when the heart is won, the head of the presumptuous is often won with it.”



So he debated, and steadied himself over this great crisis ; no longer as a mistaken well-meaning man, but as one who sought the truth—aye, more—THE CHRISTIAN TRUTH. Why not for him, as well as others, that blessed martyrdom ? Why stand in his own light ? Why not show forth the Christian's privilege ?—to cheer, and to encourage, and to guide—"in a short time fulfilling a long time."

There was a mighty struggle in his soul ; and yet, like a conscientious man, he was timidly afraid of being biassed by his peculiar reward in store. Sometimes in his perplexity he wished that Minnie were married to the Curate, that his sincerity and his faith might stand forth unbiassed. The black thorn is said to put forth its blossoms early, but the fruit remains the whole summer and harvest without ripening ; and yet its time comes. In winter, when the frost is sharp, the ice and snow are on the ground, it ripens ; it is pressed and fermented, and event-



ually becomes a pleasant wine. In the same manner is the Christian's faith : not a broad way at first, but the straight way, to do its best with opportunity. God does not always show us the result of our labours ; we know not what is success, or what failure.

And Carsfield was content to work out his time. With the purest love, his thoughts followed her—his own love's image ! She, who like a guide to him, had been thrown in his pathway in this world to lure and direct him—she had, as it were, become the reality of truth. He wished they would not repeat the torment to him that she was about to be married ; and in his perplexity, that staid and sober Unitarian repeated the lines—

“ Love ! love ! what wilt thou with this heart of mine ?  
Naught see I fixed or sure in thee !  
I do not know thee, nor what deeds are thine,  
Naught see I fixed or sure in thee.  
Shall I be mute, or vows with prayers combine ?  
Ye who are blessed in loving, tell me.  
Love ! love ! what wilt thou with this heart of mine,  
MY GUIDING STAR ! or surely naught to me.”



And the Unitarian felt *triste* and sorrow-stricken; big tears coursed each other down his cheeks, he pushed his books from him, and promised himself the matter of this marriage should be cleared up, either one way or the other.



## CHAPTER XX.

AND Carsfield was not the only one who, in spite of his occupation, was perplexed with the report of these engagements. That the Captain was about to be married soon reached the ears of Miss Dashwood the elder ; and she said to her niece,

“ I told you, my dear, if you remember, that you were talking nonsense. Somehow or another, I thought that Captain Lethbridge was anything but in earnest. Had he been so, he would have desired a private interview with me, to have declared his intentions ; and would thereby have as-



certained how far the overtures on his part would meet with my approval. Neither would the settlements have been omitted in the declaration. The easy way he goes to work, does not, in my eyes, look at all like business. I am forced to think he is merely a flirt; and this news of his engagement just confirms my opinion."

Rosa said little in reply to her aunt, for she had hardly made up her own mind respecting the matter in question. That she liked the Captain she readily confessed to herself; and she fancied—though it was only a fancy—that he liked her as well.

"If he is in real earnest," she said, "he will speak out in due time. If he is not, I am still single, and there is no harm done. If we have, as may be said, wasted our time, there is so much of the superfluous article to lose, that we shall not be called to render an account until the year is rolled off the scene, when he will be far away, and I may place him among the dead *bouquet* of



*beaux*, that will then only live in my remembrance."

The aunt was not supposed to take it as this easy matter of indifference; and she replied, with more than her usual shortness of manner,

"Although I do not like the mystified manner he has pursued, yet I should be exceedingly annoyed, Rosa, if he does propose, and still more annoyed if you were to accept him. Recollect, I have always considered you as my adopted daughter; and I did not so adopt you, that you should leave me, and run away with the first idle lover that wishes you to decide in his favour. Marriage, remember, is a responsible position, and one that you are not calculated to enter. I do not mean to infer that you will not make a man happy; but, my dear, you are too young even to think about it, and too little able to bear the trials of life's chequered scene. You know nothing of its ups and downs; and, besides, you know so little of housekeeping. Why, I cannot



even get you to ask the price of anything you order for me. A man would soon be ruined with you at the head of his establishment. House-keeping is no joke, I can tell you, even with old and well-tried servants; and a pretty hash, I fear, you would make of it. And, besides all this, your duty is to live single for my sake; it would be deep ingratitude, after all I have done, to leave me at a moment's notice, and unite yourself with a man of whom you know comparatively nothing. Rosa, I had hoped better things of you."

Rosa said little in reply, for she knew her aunt too well to fight with her over a vexed question; and she had also tact enough to know that a victory gained too soon has to be fought again. So she sung and played to her aunt the same as usual, had their evening's game of chess, and threaded her needle for her as kindly as ever. Her aunt kissed her on parting for the night, calling her still her dutiful Rosa.



And Rosa was dutiful ; but she hoped, nevertheless, that she should hear more of the Captain. And she slept and dreamt of the rough voyage of life ; but in the midst of vicissitudes and dangers, these trials were shared and supported by the strong arm, resolute will, and affectionate kindness of the man of her heart ; and this man was Captain Lethbridge.



## CHAPTER XXI.

THE little quiet village of Stoke had become as the whirl-about of a fair ; and each of the principal *dramatis personæ* were going the round, for their own peculiar pleasure. The Curate felt himself a different man now that he was to all intents and purposes about to turn Benedict. He wondered what he could have been thinking of to let so much reality of time elapse ; but it was not too late to make that time good, and he formed all sorts of excellent resolves ; he felt that he had need to work, and work he would ; he would take pupils—anything to make the desired



both ends meet. He should marry as a poor man, and how many sensible men had set him the example! He had not then the slightest knowledge that Fanny had property of her own; and when he did know it, even with half an eye on the living of Stoke, he never failed to compliment himself on the disinterestedness of his choice, even to the remainder of his life; yet he was about to possess himself of that wealth beyond rubies—a good and virtuous wife.

And now with what different steps did he wend his way to the Rectory, to the time in which he had doubted of Minnie's love. It was something gained in the uncertainties of life to be certain of success, and so he felt. The rector was evidently his friend, and made him promise, with an ambiguous sort of look, that he would seek no better means of mending his fortune than biding on the hill side where he was, and awaiting his luck.

“You are my curate, Bramley,” he said, with his usual aggravating pomposity of style. “Re-



main my curate. I don't say what I will do for you; but wait. And pray let Fanny copy out your sermons for you; many of mine, in this manner, are quite at your service. I hate that boggle you fall into—that hemming and hawing. Do, I say, take a lesson out of my book. I can tell you there is nothing like it. They say I prose; but is it not better than the rant and tear of the present day sermons?"

Fanny was 'in the drawing-room, talking seriously with her cousin: her heart was full of its future prospects, and she said—

"If love does not come, Minnie, it goes; that is the accepted old adage. And again, if not an Adam at its birth, it is no love at all. So are the soothsayers for us, and against us. I cannot say that I do not believe in love at first sight, for I have no epoch from which to date mine; but the first moment I saw Henry Bramley I knew that his love for me must become a matter of growth—that it was essential to transplant it from one



soil to another ; and this has been gently done ; and though the plant should droop a little at first, I must hope, by care and culture, and the warm spring of my own affections, to bring this love round to health and vigour. You must teach me, Minnie, by your own example of godliness and quiet, to keep this love. Marriage life is a long story, and often told. There is much to learn in its failure, and in its blissful state of happiness. You must see, my dear cousin, that I take the right course of administering to my husband's comfort. Bramley has had his own way for a long time ; and, as all young women do, I start with the idea of bringing him round to be a different creature to that which he is at present. In the first place, I cannot, as a wife, stand the slippers or the foot-stool before the fire ; and such a foot-stool ! His pill boxes, letters, and cards must be all cleared away from that high old-fashioned mantel-piece ; his flowers must be put in a vase, and not in that old, un-



seemly jug. These are the roughs I already see in my path; and then he slouches in his walk—and his hat—good lack! I see all these imperfections as plain as you do, and, I daresay love him for it only all the better; but these, I repeat, are the stumbling-blocks of married life—the creature is accepted as he stands; but the first note a young girl makes is, that he is by no means to remain as she finds him. She sets forth with the idea that she is to startle the world with the perfection she brings out of her own true beloved; and the chances are that she does startle the world, for he will not stand by any means the changes she anticipated; and then she finds, unless consenting to take him as he is, that she had better have let it alone altogether.”

Minnie, whilst listening to her cousin, looked somewhat thoughtful and sad. She could not agree with the opinions her dear Fanny professed. Woman, she believed, was sent as a help-mate to man, and if she saw there was need of change



and of advice, how could she with propriety withhold such advice? She was thinking of her own position with Mr. Carsfield; but recovering herself, she said—

“Do not misunderstand me, Fanny, or mix up your happy lot with my sad and sobering reflections. I see no reason why you should seek to alter Mr. Bramley in any way; his bachelor notions and his careless mode of doing things, will alter of themselves. It is natural, living the rough life he does, and so solitary on the top of that beautiful hill, that he should be rough in his notions, emulating his companions, the rooks and crows, in the simplicity of his arrangements. Still, knowing his innate worth of heart, you cannot do better than take him as you find him, as far as he is himself concerned. But this must not infer that the generality of women should take the generality of husbands just as they find them—good, bad, and indifferent—without making a minute enquiry into their character and their



“ But do not look so solemn, Fanny ; nothing of this, my dear cousin, pertains to you, neither will the cap fit Mr. Bramley in any thing that I have said. Your prospects, with God’s blessing, are surely as happy as any girl’s need be. It is true I have been sensible of his regard for me ; but you know I never deceived either him or myself on the subject. I daresay I might have liked him had I never seen any one I liked better.”

And here Minnie sighed again a long, deep sigh.

“ My life is a peculiar life,” she said, “ full of sunshine and of sorrow. I still love, and love dearly ; but it is a love I almost shame even to avow to myself ; and it is presuming almost on your affection, dear Fanny, to make you the confidant, and to confess it to you as I have done. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, its own peculiar trials ; and I have more trials than I am ready or willing to admit to myself. Sometimes



I am even worldly-minded enough to pine for that large red house, and to think—aye, with regret—of the good I could have done had I consented to become its mistress. Prosperity mixed with bitterness! Surely it is better as it is; and I shall keep on the safe side of matrimony—a momentous step at best—until it may please God to grant me my heart's first wish—the joy over one sinner that repenteth. Single life has its duties, and many blessings attend their fulfilment. So I will not be like Jephtha's daughter, bewailing myself upon the mountain's top; I must not deplore my case too tenderly; better let me mix myself up with your happiness, my dear Fanny. I hear Mr. Bramley's voice in the distance; do not let us prose any longer, but join him and my father in the study."



## CHAPTER XXII.

CAPTAIN LETHBRIDGE seemed to have been sensible of his dear Rosa's dream; nay, he was not sure but that he had sympathised in a long continuous dream of the same sort. Be that as it may, his toilet was attended to with more than its usual care; he felt pleased with himself, with his *tournure*, and with the elasticity of his spirits.

His wishes led him on, and in his walk he soon found himself in the path that led to Miss Dashwood's residence.

He called. The butler looked less moody than



usual; he was cautiously invited to "step in," and on reaching the drawing-room he found the aunt more agreeable and chatty than he had yet had the felicity of finding her. The weather prevented her taking her usual walk, so she was pleased to be enlivened by the sprightly remarks and well-selected compliments of the Captain.

The drawing-table was soon adorned with the choice flowers which he presented them; and Rosa set about arranging them in divers vases, as best accorded with each plant, separating the exotics from the more home keeping flowers, and taking especial care to place the forget-me-nots in an elegant little blue and gold cup by themselves.

The Captain noticed the compliment paid to his gift, but said nothing; indeed the elder Miss Dashwood talked so much that it was impossible to get in a word.

He wished that Rosa would speak; that she



would say something touching the forget-me-nots; anything to show that she was not acting mechanically in their arrangement. But it was in vain that he waited, for the old lady's talk still went on. So, a little out of patience, he drew out a rose from one of the arranged bouquets, and made the remark that it was the *rose sans épine*, in contradistinction to the received opinion that there is no rose without a thorn.

"And Miss Rosa," he ventured to ask, with a marked emphasis on the name, "to which sort of rose does her nature lay claim? Is it the gentle thornless plant, or the bright flower with its *chevaux de frise*, expressing, admire if you please, but touch me not."

Rosa laughed and replied,

"I fancy I am very well if you take me on the smooth. I will not answer for myself; if my leaves are ruffled, kindness, like the sun, is to me all in all. I think I should droop and fade in the shade, and cease to care for anything."



She said this in a pretty plaintive tone, and the Captain was dying to express his admiration. But still the aunt was the leader of the conversation, and her subjects were so far apart from the object nearest his heart, that he saw there was no chance but to make a bold dash, and he asked somewhat *apropos de rien*, addressing the aunt,

“Miss Dashwood, how is it that you have continued all your days to remain single?”

“Because I knew when I was well off,” she replied, rather taken by surprise, and with somewhat in the manner and tone expressing, “what is that to you?” But egotism came to the rescue, and she added, “I have had, as you may suppose, my lovers and my followers. They amused me, of course; but only amused me, for I saw with a glance of what stuff they were made. I dealt with them all in a matter-of-fact way—no nonsense, no romance—and this soon cured them in a most summary way of all idea of matrimony.”



Captain Lethbridge felt rather put aback, and admitted to himself that this was rather a bad start. But knowing the little time he had to lose, he bethought himself of the faint heart, and again boldly came to the front and said,

“But suppose, Miss Dashwood, you had been in love; what would you have done then?”

She looked up archly from her work, and in a sprightly tone replied,

“Oh! I was very cunning, Captain Lethbridge. I was not to be taken by surprise. I knew that all the arts, the oaths, and the sighs that were lavished on me were only meant to further a purpose—a sort of pitfall strewed with flowers. Have you not seen the pains that boys will take to catch yon little birds?—the bait and the net that is to entrap the poor little souls—things, I mean. And is not the boy father to the man? I hate boys; and with all due submission, I hate men.”

The Captain made a bow, and she continued,



“To clear myself from vanity, I must explain that I have always had a very nice little independent fortune, and I have been willing to keep it; for I saw, with all the disinterestedness evinced, that this was a mighty embellisher of my charms. It was never spoken of, it is true, for I never let things go so far as this; but I had a knack,” and here she looked cunning, “of making them discover their designs. I am speaking of my lovers, of course; and I found it was only to give them sufficient rope, and they were sure to hang themselves.”

Captain Lethbridge did not at all like the turn the conversation was taking. He felt, as it were, called to step forth and to proclaim his own honourable intentions; and to state that if he married he did not look for money; there was no rope to hang him; that his cavalry commission was sufficient to keep himself and his tender belongings; and he replied, with a sort of “bother the women!” in his tone and looks,



"I would call you worldly minded, Miss Dashwood, if I were not on my best behaviour. Surely you are not one to take up the dark side of human nature? What are your sentiments, Miss Rosa?"

"Oh!" she said, "I think those my Aunt professes are horrid. It is an old fight between us, and we never agree on the subject. She has an idea that men are the most selfish and unprincipled of animals. I confess I fall much short of her in my estimate; it seems so rude to call them unprincipled."

"No, my dear," interrupted the elder Miss Dashwood, rather shocked to hear her opinions promulgated in such good company, "I do not go quite so far as that."

"But you know, my dear Aunt, you do say that love in one scale and riches in the other, poor little Cupid is sure to kick the beam."

"Oh! shocking!" exclaimed the Captain, for something to get the talk in his own hands.



"But what say you, Miss Rosa? What are your opinions? How far do you admit the soft impeachment?"

"Why," said Rosa, in an honest and pleasant way, "I am somewhat *hors de combat* in the rational catalogue of interest. Whoever has me must take me for myself alone. I am almost thankful to say I comprise my own wealth—a prize or a blank, as the case may be. So the chances are, I shall be seeming to act up to my Aunt's creed in remaining single. Perhaps it is as well, for I suspect there are few men resolute enough to take a girl for herself alone."

"I am that man, Rosa," said the Captain, dauntlessly stepping forth from his chair. "I will take you, Rosa; I will love you, Rosa, and give you my heart of hearts, if you will bless me with your nice honest little hand in exchange."

He took her hand as he spoke, and pressed it to his lips. The Aunt looked startled, and Rosa looked startled.



"All this is nonsense," said the Aunt, in a sort of aside; but she exclaimed, in concert with her niece, "What can you mean, Captain Lethbridge?"

"Why, mean," he replied, emphatically, "exactly what I have said. If you will have me, Rosa, I will have you. And if your aunt will go with us to India, she has my consent to be taken in the bargain."

Miss' Dashwood, senior, smiled, but still her cheerfulness was gone: and she said, meekly,

"I cannot part with Rosa. She is the only creature I have to love in the world."

"That, my dear madam," replied the Captain, is double quick time, "is your own fault, according to your own confession, the result of single blessedness. Would you have your niece pursue the same course?"

"No," said Miss Dashwood, with a grim decision; "I certainly would not."

He took her at her word, and replied,

"Then, ma'am, give her to a true and honest



man who will love her and cherish her ; and battle the watch for her sake and for yours, too, if there is need. But let it be a *bona fide* offer, plain spoken, but as sincere as plain."

Rosa looked imploringly at her Aunt, but the old lady was stiff as a ramrod. No, there was no softness, no coming-round, no appearance in the world of being "taken in," as she persisted in calling it. "Single," in short, was the word of command.

"Then what is to be done?" asked the Captain, despondingly ; "it is not for me to make Rosa undutiful to an aunt who has thus far acted as her mother. Still, my dear madam, the seas are about to divide us ; ought they to divide two loving hearts? Settle it, that Rosa will be happier with me as years go on ; whilst you, as her aunt, her guardian, and her friend, will have accomplished your mission by leaving her in honest and in tender hands."

A tear stood in the old lady's eye, and Captain



Lethbridge saw that it was only to follow his suit up to make the day his own; so he turned to Rosa and said,

“I must bring you to the rescue: what do you say on the subject? A word from you must decide the question; for I will take you, Rosa, in spite of all the aunts in the world. I repeat, therefore, Rosa, advisedly, what do you say?”

There was a moment's silence; and it seemed quite awful to Captain Lethbridge, for he heard that silence interrupted only by the beatings of his own heart, and he felt that the little hand, which was still retained in his, was fluttering to get free. “It is all up,” he settled; but Rosa sidled to her aunt, sank on her knees before her, hiding her face in her lap; and she said, in a clear and sonorous voice,

“My dear aunt, you must give your consent. My mind is made up, and I take Captain Lethbridge at his offer—for better and, let us trust, not for worse.”



She had risen as she spoke and stood beside him, looking beautiful for her, for a bright animation glowed on her countenance, and there was an independence, blended with tenderness, in her manner, that charmed him. She appeared even, as it were, to have grown some inches. The aunt looked at her with admiration and surprise; she seemed to think it impossible that her gentle Rosa should so step forth and act for herself. But the antagonistical look was gone, and she said,

“You will repent this, Rosa, take my word. Yet I give you my consent, seeing that whether or no your own mind is made up to following your inclinations.”

Happily for the Captain, dinner was announced, and they were all aware that his aunt dined at the same hour, so there was nothing left for him but to take his departure, the elder Miss Dashwood saying at the same time,

“I expect, my young sir, you will think better



of this. Dinner is announced, as you hear, and remember, whether we have means or no, dinner is sure to be announced in every well regulated family. However, have your own way, and let the butcher's bills bring you to your senses. Marry or not marry, you have always my good wishes; and if I can scrape a little together to make the pot boil I will, but I expect fully that both you and Rosa will come round to my way of thinking ere to-morrow morning."

It was but a short time given, but even a longer would not have been likely. Rosa gave him her hand as he passed her to the door, and there was a clinging fondness in the way in which she did it. So he danced off down the smooth garden walk, with a merry countenance and a light heart.

Rosa stood and watched him out of sight.

"Come, my dear, come to dinner," said her aunt. "Captain Lethbridge knows his way. It is now after our time, and recollect that love is but meagre fare for those who merely look on;



and I fancy I shall relish my steak, notwithstanding the pretty kettle of fish that you have made of it. But who would have thought," she continued, pondering over her words, "who would have thought that all these flowers would have come to this? This trap! This pitfall! I can only say, Rosa, with all my example before you, I did hope that through your life I might have expected better things."



## CHAPTER XXIII.

SPEAKING of the union of souls, a German writer considers it by no means an affair of quick growth; and conceives that even when an infinite arm, as it were, presses us suddenly upon a new heart, we must still have long intimately known this heart among the holy pictures of our longings, and have often taken down this picture, and have often looked at it, and worshipped.

This living-love Fanny Ashmore had long experienced; but she little thought it was thereby a foretaste of what her after love would be, when she would see her fondest love realised. She had



gained her *point d'appui*, the love that she had looked up to, and desired nothing better in this life. True love is immortal ; and what a glorious day would be the dawn of her marriage promise.

Bramley was busy, on his side, in making a thousand preparations. There was the little drawing-room to furbish up ; to break gently to his old servant that he was about to bring her home a mistress ; and to teach his dog not to take the best place by the fire. He wished all the trouble over ; but he said, cheerily, to his dog—

“She is coming, Charlie—she is coming, so there is good luck and comfort in store for us.”

And Bramley was happy in his prospect. It was such a blessing to be assured of Fanny's affection, and to feel that she would be his last love, even though she were not exactly his first. So he went merrily to work, and began soon to wonder, in the improvement accomplished, how



he could have lived so long amidst his bachelor and untidy habits.

Whilst in all the *débris* of his painters and glaziers, his mops and pails, he received a visit from his long absent friend, now no longer a rival, but a brother comrade in the same field of glory.

The Captain laughed at the *bouleversement*, as he called it, of the Curate's dwelling, and complimented him on the strength of the motive that could have turned his rook's nest into a promising and compact dwelling.

"One would think, my good fellow, you were going to have an auction here, and that pill boxes, slippers, and all, were to be knocked down to the best bidder. This looks like war with a vengeance. Is your furlough, then, as nearly expired as mine? Time, tide, and the post wait for no man. Let me know what you have settled, and whether your doom is fixed?"

It was a pleasant story to tell; and Bramley



did not omit in his thankfulness to make the recount interesting.

“Smooth as the river’s course on a summer’s day!” responded Lethbridge. “Thank your stars that you have not a troublesome old aunt to deal with in the way that I have. My Rosa is angelic enough; but she has such a crooked stick to contend with, that it will be a relief to the dear girl to get out of her clutches.”

“You surely do not mean to infer that she has made any objection to your marrying her niece?”—that ugly girl, Bramley had nearly said, but he corrected himself in time, and substituted—“That she is sorry to part with her I can well fancy, but such a match is too good to be slighted.”

“No,” explained Captain Lethbridge, “she had not exactly the effrontery to withhold her consent, but she gives it in such a sparing and ungracious, left-handed way that it required all the spirit my Rosa possesses to rise superior to



such tyrannical measures. The old lady talks wonderous big of the offers she has refused in her palmy days ; and I thought it must be a bold man who would have taken her. She seems to live comfortably, and her rooms are nicely furnished, with all sorts of tag-rag over the backs of her sofas and chairs. Why is it that old maids are so wonderfully set up in anti-macassars?"

The Curate laughed at the observation. He saw his friend was annoyed at the brusque manner of Miss Dashwood senior, and he said—

"But the fair niece is better behaved to you, I suspect ; if she has accepted you, never mind the frowardness of the old aunt. She never thought to lose her niece, so she is so farexcusable. Pray is it true that Miss Rosa has a little money, and that at her own disposal?"

"I am proud to say," rejoined the Captain, "that I know nothing touching the matter. I have taken Rosa for herself alone, and whether



she has money or not it is with me quite a secondary consideration. With care and economy we shall be rich enough to rub along. I am only too delighted to show the aunt that whether she gives, or gives not, the dear little Rosa will still be mine. She did talk something of adding her mite; I merely took it as a stumbling-block put up to try my faith. Be that as it may, Rosa is mine, and that at the end of a month. So do, Bramley, get all these things into their places again, your house in order, and let us be married on the same day. You are more used to the ceremony than I am, and will prompt and support me, whilst I do my best to encourage you. The ladies need nothing of the sort. Leave them alone, they generally have courage enough to carry them through."

"You say right," replied Bramley, "the bridegroom is apt to feel some anxiety as he waits for his bride—clammy cold hands, and shivering teeth, and to require sal volatile and



encouragement at the hands of his best man. They all seem so immensely afraid that the bride will not come; and that is foolish, for she soon appears, with the coolest *nonchalance* in the world, thinking more of her bouquet than the rest, yet proving that women are our best supporters in all the vicissitudes of life."

"Vicissitudes of life!" repeated the Captain, laughing; "this looks something like the need of *sal volatile*."

"No, not one bit. Does your Rosa like the idea of India, and an Eastern campaign?"

"To be sure, in the same way that your lady love likes the idea of mounting this hill, and living in your rookery in the clouds. 'Where the treasure is there will the heart be also.' It matters little when they have made their choice. Women, as we have just settled, are most desperate in carrying out their intentions; but you have none of the dangers here to anticipate that encompass me and my Rosa.



Perhaps, in the steep acclivity, a few cases of 'bellows to mend,' but that is all. Still, as your fortunes mount—for I always think you will have the living—so will you descend from your altitude. I wish you luck, my good fellow; and I think you have it, though it is hard to know what is best for man in this world. At all events, I must think you have the best of it. The presence of a wife cheers up the prospect a little; but take my word, *entre nous*, and that means between you and I, India is not the *couleur de rose* quarter that we soldiers make it our business to paint it."

It was a startling, yet acceptable surprise to Captain Lethbridge at his next interview with his Rosa to find that Miss Dashwood had volunteered her a rich endowment of pin money, asserting at the same time that she would immediately settle on her three times as much if she would only, in wisdom, break off her engagement. Where the little woman had scraped up the money



that she had this right over seemed a puzzle to all, and truly took the Captain by surprise. There was no show in her establishment, no display, and yet the settlements were of the most liberal description.

“But all settled on herself,” were the aunt’s screaming last words; “and let it be tied up tight, and no latitude given for her husband to make ducks and drakes of it.”

Captain Lethbridge did not care; his heart was in all; and he replied, with a look well pleased—

“Do what you will, my dear madam, and I shall be content; keep your money or give your money, it is all the same to me. Rosa is a fortune in herself, with those pearly teeth; and be it as it may, I shall soon teach her, as my wife, that what is hers is mine, what is mine is my own. This is the matrimonial creed, and cannot be instilled too early.”



## CHAPTER XXIV.

THE worthy Rector's thoughts were as fully engaged in the approaching wedding, as were the hearts of the young people. The affairs of the bouquets and the bride cake made him feel quite young again, and he had always his word in due season to bestow on those who sought his advice. He wondered they did not seek it oftener, considering its worth beyond price. He fancied there was something in his very tone of voice to bring conviction ; the fact was, that he liked the sound of his own voice, and, with the intent of doing service, there was something in his ears



very harmonious in its modulations. Speaking of marriage, he liked to recollect the speech in the old play, and would say, with a becoming pomposity,

"Take it as those that deny purgatory :  
It locally contains a heaven or hell—  
There is no third place in it."

Now, young folk look on marriage in a much lighter point of view ; they merely add to their own substantial life the additional embellishment of the graceful and the simple ; some bright and beauteous being is to lie light upon the surface of their happiness ; a splendid picture to cheer their vision, and with a bright and unruffled spirit, whenever solitude or serious pursuits become irksome, she is to be there to cheer them. But this is all nonsense ; the wife is just flesh and blood, like themselves. She has her cares, and she has her joys. Beauty and vivacity fall away under the anxieties that will surely spring up in domestic life. "I will have no cares," said the



maiden. "You shall have no cares," says the for-better-for-worse. But, as I maintain, these halcyon arrangements are all nonsense; the wear and tear of every-day life gives a new colour to things. The pair each think they have hung a trinket around their neck, and they find it a millstone. But these are extreme cases; with prudence, taste, fancy, and affection, there cannot be much harm done.

So the worthy Rector made the approaching weddings and the marriage feast in the Gospel, the subject of his discourse for the approaching Sunday; piquing himself on his preaching of matters which would come home to the very hearts of his young hearers. He told them that the wedding garment was different to the ordinary attire of the Christian man—a holiday garment, and with something more of the joyous than he would usually wear; a fitting and cheerful adorning, not one of every day occurrence. The wedding garment is emblematical of that which he should



ever be decked with—joy, peace, and gladness, kindness, charity, and long suffering. Unless he wear this garb constantly, and as a habit, he is neither fitted for matrimony nor the kingdom of Heaven; neither is Heaven fitted for him. He cannot put on these things at a moment's notice; for kindliness consists in all those small repeated acts of thoughtful consideration that spring from a loving heart, and are the sunbeams that lighten up an otherwise dark and woeful world, rendering the home of man's earthly tabernacle a foretaste of those joys which will be eternal.

The Rector then wound up his discourse with a great deal of practical advice, well fitted for the coming occasion. His hearers appreciated the compliment paid them; and though feeling somewhat like culprits hearing their condemned sermon, they promised themselves to profit by the occasion; and if the brides that were to be, allowed their thoughts to stray a little towards the becomingness of white lace and orange blos-



soms, it was excusable, considering the nearness of the event in prospect.

The young ladies' *trousseaux*—where there was so little to talk about—were the conversation and admiration of the village; the one so neat, so modest, so suited to the Rector's niece; the other partaking of the gorgeousness of the east; the one, the retired Curate's wife; whilst the other had to take her share in the soldier's glory, and the laurels he might wear. Thus, even in the same village, are the different lots of mortals cast; this place to one, that to another; the distinction being in their own behaviour, under these circumstances: in order that God's will may be done in us, by us, and with us to the end.



## CHAPTER XXV.

THERE was no one so busy in these preparations for the bridal festival of her dear Fanny, as Minnie; and if her heart would at times sadden over its own sorrows, she thought that it would have been so natural—so like himself—if Mr. Carsfield should have come and offered his congratulations on the approaching event—an event that occupied them so much. And she found, in the midst of her busiest moments, that there was the unsettled feeling of some one missing—a lingering hope that he would come; and this, doubt it as she would, still burnt, flickering, yet bright even



to the last. Did she not know, in all these yearnings, the exact road by which he would approach; and sitting at her window, and looking through the lattice, like the mother of Sisera, she seemed to cry, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" until she returned the glad answer to herself, by beholding him with her father on the lawn.

They were talking earnestly, and it seemed a question and answer sort of discourse.

Now the Rector would approach near the house, when suddenly Mr. Carsfield would stop, and place his hand upon his arm. Then the Rector would take up the argument, for such it seemed; and in his earnestness he re-trod the ground over which they had already passed.

As they retreated, Minnie's heart sunk.

"Will he come?" she asked; "or will he not? No—yes—no."

"And then again they turned.

"Surely he talks of me," she said, putting



her hand to her flushed cheek, to feel how much it burnt. "He does," she said in her simplicity ; and then she busied herself at her work, feeling that being so near he must and would come. But when she looked again they were a long way off. Her father was evidently more earnest than ever, but Mr. Carsfield seemed to stand doggedly calm.

Then the Rector raised his hands, and turned ; and it plainly said,

"If you won't, you won't !"

And the Rector walked with a quick pace, his friend steadily watching him. As the Rector reached the hall steps, Mr. Carsfield gave one look towards the house, and quietly pursued his way.

"Well?" said Minnie, as her father entered the room.

"Well! not at all well," he replied; "anything but well. Here is Carsfield doing all he can to show his friendship for Fanny and her



mate, and his respect for me, and yet he will not come to the wedding. He sends his carriage, he sends his fruit and flowers, and, I believe, a lot of presents to the bride, and yet he will not come."

"But did he give a reason?"

"No."

"Did you suspect one?"

"I did."

"But what did he say?"

"Very little, though he seemed full of something. To my invitation, he replied, 'the day was not yet come; he could not assist in the wedding, but that we should see him on the morrow.'"

"The morrow!" pettishly replied Minnie; "and when the morrow comes, he answers still, to-morrow!"

Minnie had not even time to ponder over the failure of her hopes. Mr. Carsfield was not coming to the wedding, that was certain; but the



busy importance of her work had still to go on, to regulate the feast, and to arrange for the school children to appear in procession, strewing, as they walked, the pathway of the bride with flowers. Then she had to collect the presents that were pouring in for her dear Fanny, and to set them on a table separate from all the other ornaments of the room.

"Fanny is so very silly," she mentally exclaimed; "even now she can think of nothing but Mr. Bramley."

And among these gifts was every evidence that the Rectory party and the approaching festival were not forgotten by Mr. Carsfield. A costly tea equipage for the bride, bracelets for the bridesmaids; and among them, one of a rich and rare pattern, directed expressly for Miss Lonsdale.

Minnie took it up; and, in spite of herself, her tears fell, and soon dimmed the lustre of the bright jewel that formed the centre. She felt herself so unaccountably ungrateful in finding



that, though apart from them, neither she nor her dear Fanny was forgotten.

It broke the spirit of her hope, that at a moment like this he should hold himself as one differing from themselves. It showed much fellowship of good will ; and yet the wide space that separated them !

Even among the exotics that were sent, the bouquet of orange blossoms was not forgotten.

“ Affection and feeling he must have,” thought Minnie. She could trace it in the very selections he had made. “ And yet—and yet how contradictory ! the unyielding hardness on one hand, and the ever springing kindness and thoughtfulness on the other.”

And Minnie continued steadily at her work, arranging and setting off these gay gifts, even whilst her heart was aching ; and she looked at all these things as she would at a funeral pyre.

“ It is sad,” she kept saying to herself, “ that he should persist in being of one way of thinking



whilst we are all so decidedly in another ! If he would but change, even at a moment's notice."

She sank upon her knees, and hid her face in the cushions of the sofa, asking earnestly and fearlessly for this triumph of the one true faith. Her prayer was one of single-hearted devotion ; strong in its simplicity and simple in its strength. She arose happier—rested, as it were, and refreshed ; her heart had been in her prayer, and had brought her life."

She felt she had made evidence of her duty ; a calm spirit came over her, and she perseveringly returned to the numberless orders she had to give, and the arrangements she had to make. Her duty was done where a soul was at stake ; and she could only leave the rest.

But how astounded she would have been to have heard that Carsfield had changed ; that he had left one position without exactly having arrived at another. She felt deeply that he would not come to the wedding, but she never saw the refusal in



a spiritual light; shut up as he was in his large red mansion, all these conflicts were to himself. Still, there was a sing-song in her head over the morrow he had promised.

And she again repeated Lopez de Vega's lines,

"How oft my guardian angel gently cried,  
'Soul from thy casement look and thou shalt see,  
How he persists to knock and wait for thee !'  
And oh ! how often to that voice of sorrow,  
'To-morrow we will open,' is replied,  
And when the morrow comes, the answer still, 'to-morrow.'"

And Mr. Carsfield felt sad and alone when he had put his veto against attending the marriage feast; and to his eyes his large red mansion looked more desolate than ever. He walked through his long suite of rooms, his library, and then to his conservatory; and then he walked the long range back again, when his dinner was announced. The chandelier was illuminated, adding all the brilliancy it could give to the massive furniture. The red wines threw shadows of a lustrous crimson hue athwart the snowy



linen. There was everything to satisfy a master's eye, and to please a refined man's palate; but Carsfield felt conscious of a void, and the load that oppressed his spirit; his heart ached to think why he had so far hung back; how it was that he had already not rendered himself worthy of assisting at a Christian's wedding. He was not the steady, stiff-necked, confident person he had been: the still pool lying in his bosom had been disturbed by a simple, though earnest girl; the pebble had been dropped in, and the vibration was to go on through eternity. The strong man wept like a child—and he looked forward to “the morrow” he had promised.



CHAPTER XXVI.

"Holy and wondrous beautiful thou art,  
Thou strength of love !"

AND spite of the *pros* and *cons*, the ups and downs of rough and smooth, the happy wedding day came steadily on to all the parties concerned. Minnie had put herself steadily to the work ; had packed Fanny's *trousseau*, rehearsed the village children, and seen the breakfast laid, ere they went to church.

"I cannot fancy, dear Fanny, that you are



leaving us all," she said, as she put the final finish to her cousin's dress; "that the last moment is come—and that on your return you will seek another home. We shall miss you so dreadfully."

Here her tears fell fast; but she brushed them away as Fanny replied,

"You must get quite used to climbing the hill of separation; think how happy we ought to be that it is only this hill divides us. Bramley will never divide us, Minnie, busy though he may be; I leave you, my sweet cousin, only for a time. The love that we bear to each other nothing can divide. And now, Minnie, give me my bouquet;" for Minnie still held it with tenacious hold. "What! one kiss more. Oh! Minnie—Minnie, I wish Mr. Carsfield, with all his attentions, were in the Red Sea."

"The River Jordan," replied Minnie, with forced smile, "the baptismal river would better suit my purpose."



It was a morning long to be remembered in the simple village of Stoke. The early spring, when nature is still dormant in its energy, the bright sun, and the cold wind, when the early flowers seem to think they had better have remained under ground a little longer. Still, they bear the promise of what is to come; timid heralds of all the sweets in store, dealt out by nature's careful hand. The childhood, as it were, of the bright and teeming year; first the flowers, and then the fruit, and then the age of winter.

But the brides thought nothing of all this; it was the birthday of their felicity, and there was little time either to think or to moralise. Minnie's prayers were long and fervent that morning. She seemed to have more than the wedding group to intercede for; her highest and deepest feelings were aroused; faith in God; trust in human nature and a calm hope that everything would happen for the best.



The good Rector began the wedding day with a full sense of his own dignity and the importance of his calling. He was dressed betimes, repeating the lines from Horace,

*"Nestar dum oppaam, nec precedentibus imito."*

He walked to the church in his robes long before the time appointed, protesting that they would all be late; scolding until his voice was broken by sobs, on unexpectedly meeting Fanny, decked in her veil and orange blossoms.

All in that little village was up and astir; two weddings in the same day! What do you tell of! The school children, dressed in their Sunday best, ranged along the path that led to the church porch.

It was a picturesque and happy sight, to see that country churchyard so full of friends and sight-seers, crowding to catch their view of the brides and the pretty bridesmaids. Rosa was dressed in the richest white silk and Honiton lace; Fanny in simple white muslin. Their veils



were the same ; but Fanny's wreath was real ; Miss Dashwood's artificial.

The Rector, though unassisted in the marriage service by any clerical aid, yet gave entire satisfaction to himself, as well as to all present. Having it his own way, he read the full service ; and it was only when the joy bells pealed forth that his voice began to quiver. But the rest was soon settled ; the carriage doors slammed to, and the "all right" said with a due flunkey energy.

Then came the breakfasts, and as is usually the case, a forced sort of spirits kept up ; all too conscious of their best clothes to feel at home or comfortable. Then came the healths ; and this was somewhat of a relief ; for the hammer, hammer of returning thanks partook considerably of the comical.

"We will drink Mr. Carsfield's health," said Bramley, as his carriage with the four posters came to the door. "He is a staunch friend, and I wish he were here. Tell him, Miss Lonsdale,



that amid all our felicity, we did not forget him."

"And now it is Miss Lonsdale who must return thanks," they all said, in a breath.

"I do," she replied, rising from her seat with fearless sincerity. "Mr. Carsfield is a good man, and I honestly thank you for the compliment you pay him. I will remember to tell him that he has not been forgotten."

Fanny saw that this calmness could not be long sustained; so she arose, which diverted the attention from her cousin. The bride and bridegroom gone, all was gone; and amid repeated good wishes, the party broke up. Minnie kept up her spirits to cheer her father. The children sat up to supper; and the rest of the day passed in peaceful serenity.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

A clever writer has said, "nothing is so dreadful as it seems." Neither was Minnie's sorrow over Fanny's loss so intense as she had expected it to be. The wedding day had passed off so well; and a bright sun shone on the morn on which the married pair were to start for Cumberland, to visit Mr. Bramley's relations. Minnie knew that they would love Fanny, even for her herself; and would fully appreciate the kind hands into which their son and brother had fallen.

And then there was again so much to do! so



many things to put away, and to pack Fanny's presents, and see them carefully conveyed to her bright cottage on the hill ; there to be carefully and tastefully arranged, so as to embellish this home on her return in taking possession.

And with all these things to do ; and to act at the same time as a walking dictionary to her father, who had lost Fanny, the one who was ever at his elbow when he was labouring at the new compilation of a sermon, there was a flutter at Minnie's heart—a hurry of anticipation that she would barely acknowledge and hardly give house room to. She would run away from it, and neither let it occupy or mislead. The past eventful day had gone off so well ! and in the counteraction she felt how very anxious she had been ; so she had a prayer with everything she did, and a thanksgiving for every employment. The flowers bloomed bright, and there was a cheerful song of the birds ; and her spirit seemed to renew its strength and confidence,



and to mingle, as it were, with nature's gladness.

We must leave the simple, pure-minded Minnie, rejoicing in the conscious indwelling of God's love, and meekly following in the happy path of her duty, to have a new view of Mr. Carsfield and the imperishable victory that had been gained upon him—the new world of faith that may never pass away!

It has been said that a period had come in his life when his heart was ill at ease; and this had made him ill content with the world in general, and his own conscience in particular. His hours were spent in deep reasonings and questionings; the depths of his great mind were teaching him a lesson that he was loath to learn, and still more loath to believe. And besides, his unrequited affection did not leave him at peace; it rankled in his breast, and gave him a sad feeling of his individuality and his isolated existence.



“Supposing the Christian world is right,” he would say, “and I am wrong?” And then his heart would yearn for the manifestation of the spirit. “Oh! that a dove would come straight from above and teach me the right path!”

He was struck. Had not the dove come—the gentle bird who was to lure him to salvation? Still he feared to trust himself. There should be nothing like deception, and he felt that his dove was too dear to trust himself as to the motive.

“Then I must wait,” he said. “If it is so, it is so; and I have been worse than dead. False thoughts have beset me on every side, and I have gloried in the nicety of my creed, have rejoiced in counting the clever men who have thought and think as I think; never enumerating those who have missed the straight gate and narrow way, and have sunk into perdition.”

But now a new world was quietly unfolding itself. His soul’s responsibility had come upon him, and he felt that his dogged unbelief was



dropping off as the chains of St. Peter in the dungeon—an angel letting him loose from his own mind's thralldom. His heart sickened over the time that he had lost. He felt ashamed of his own antagonism. He now longed to climb the heights upon which the apostles and prophets had stood—to feel the principle of holiness in the inner man—a sense of God's love; and he was almost ashamed, so to say, of the grace that was enlightening him.

From this abstraction he was aroused, and how? It is difficult in many cases to tell where bad ends and good begins. The "know thyself!" is not so easy an accomplishment as we are led to believe. The more we think of self the more mysterious the speculation. And to Carsfield it was a practical mystery that he, a man of health and condition, and loving as he did, should be foiled, refused, and contemptuously cast out by a penniless girl who could not have done better, so he settled, than take him, whatever his religion and



his creed. He felt that his position was critical ; he would not deceive himself—he would divide the powerful workings of his heart, and there was soon the point gained. He had put away his argumentative works, his books were separated—the goats from the sheep—and those he studied now treated of the prayer, “ Lord, I believe ; help Thou my unbelief.”

And he *was* helped, even to himself, in a most unaccountable manner. The earnestness of his call was doing God’s own work, and though it was noted not, but by him for whose sake it was sent, yet it was like rain falling on uninhabited valleys, where no eye observes the showers : still the valleys laugh and sing to God in their refreshment, without a witness.

And Carsfield was an altered man ; he had seen his mistake, late though the lesson had come ; and now he longed to recount to Minnie all the conflicts he had endured, and to become as one with her, in God’s spirit and love and in God’s own truth.



And then there was to subdue his pride—and that was the last thing left. No man, even in religion, likes to pronounce himself mistaken, and to admit that he has been wrong. But this must be the next step. So he abstained from the wedding party and, as we have already said, fixed to see Minnie the next day.

And he came. She was crossing the hall, so he met her at once; and he said, with the clear ringing voice of hope and joy,

“Peace.”

She did not understand him—how should she? And she replied, whilst her countenance beamed its satisfaction,

“It is peace. Let us be friends, Mr. Carsfield. Do not allow what I say to you to scare you from one who knows how to value your friendship.”

He had taken her hand, and she could have added, “Whatever thou art, thou art here—restored to me!” and looking kindly she led him to the sitting-room and seated herself, motioning to him to do the same. She sat quiet, for her



heart was rejoicing; and he said, in the deep tone of serious affection,

“Minnie, my own Minnie, my fondly, loved Minnie—my light, my guiding star! I am here to tell you something.”

Then, taking both her hands within her own, he poured out the long and faithful recount of all that he had suffered in himself, and accomplished by God's blessing. He told her the power her words had had upon him, leading him, by God's help to a flood of conviction—quick, powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. He said he now saw everything in a new light—himself, his past life, his present state, his future prospects in the brightness of eternity, and of God's revealed truth; a light which enabled him to see the way of peace and holiness—peace which he had never conceived till now; holiness far beyond his before finite conception. “Grant me true faith!” he had asked; and the gift had been mercifully accorded him.

And then he looked solemn as he concluded—



“Pride is the last and the crowning affliction of man. Even he who has strength to wrestle and to grapple with his mistake—his darkness—has yet hardly courage to proclaim it aloud. It is a hard struggle to regain the lost ground: but Minnie and God’s grace will help me to regain it. I will go to your father, Minnie; from our last conversation, that which I have to say and to confess will not be quite unexpected by him.”

She took him to the library. He saw her father was there: she closed the door.

Carsfield looked for his guiding star, but she was gone.

Such the blessed influence of one true loving soul on another! Mysterious affection, mighty as the hidden process by which the seed is quickened and bursts forth into a tall stem and broad leaf—a bright blooming flower.

So had Minnie’s worth and goodness and quiet efforts worked their charm. “And a sign shall



be mercifully given to the doubt of love, which shall be refused to the doubt of indifference."

And such is the triumph of faith, of simplicity of purpose, and confidence in the one great cause; —a firm, uncompromising, and single-hearted sincerity—in a short time fulfilling a long time —a pattern light of Christian truth raised up to cheer, to encourage, and to guide.

And Carsfield's doubts had vanished. He knew his Minnie had loved him, but she had resisted him and all the advantages that fortune had given him, because he was not of her own true faith. Yet her words, her looks, her quiet deeds, had touched him with their appealing and convincing tones—he was drawn after them with gentle compulsion; and with her meek, fair, and convincing speech she had caused him to yield. He seemed, whilst looking at her bright countenance, to be changed into the same likeness, the same goodness, to have no other thought than her; even as people are said to grow alike who



live together, so they seemed to have the same spirit of faith. It was not only "I believe, and therefore have I spoken," but *we* believe and therefore do we speak.

Thus is the grace of God all powerful! And no case must be considered hopeless with the true of heart.

The next Sunday, the next, and the next, Carsfield was at church. The rumour went that he was christened; if so, it must have been with the tender name of "Own one!" for so Minnie ever after called him.

And in due time the marriage between Minnie and Carsfield took place, and in a Christian church. The only stipulation was, to wait until the two brides came back from their wedding tour; and they both looked so happy—"such decoy ducks!" as Minnie called them, there was no further cause or impediment.

We need not say that the Rector, blessed with his children round him, lived to a good old age.



His younger girls married equally well as Minnie, and when gathered to his forefathers, Fanny and Mr. Bramley—for she considered it *her* inheritance—were inducted to the living.

Captain Lethbridge never lost sight of his friend, and Fanny was soon Rosa's best correspondent.

There is not much more to add ; by the living and loving earnestness which she evinced, there was no mistake concerning Minnie's happiness ; and Carsfield would say then,

“Minnie, you hardly know the many years I have loved you, and with the purest love. Stubborn in my blindness, I have grown old in this love ; my thoughts filled with your image—you, who like a light and guide have been thrown into my pathway in this world, teaching me the truth ; and what I once dreamed of has become a reality. You have been a shining light to me—a star differing from all other stars in glory ; an oasis to me in the sandy desert of this world.



You have little known the power you have had over me. You little think that every interview I have had with you has drawn me nearer to the truth, imperceptibly to myself, much less to you. I have still much to learn from you, Minnie, but if you only knew what an abyss of spiritual darkness I look back upon, you would see with what steps—slow, but sure—I have progressed.”

And Minnie replied, with a fond and trusting look—

“ How I could ever have loved such a heathen—for that I did always love you—is now a matter of marvel to me; and, strange to say, I never could have learnt to love another. My heart was strongly drawn to you, for I sometimes forgot our religious differences altogether; and then I was obliged to wrestle with the temptation, and to pray to Him who alone can order the unruly wills and affections, and to ask that I might love happily, or learn to forget you. And then I did try to forget you. It was only a trial at best;



for when I saw you again I found that I had made but little progress, and then I felt vexed with my enthrallment—angry with myself, but, worst of all, not angry with you. And then I could only turn to *my* book, as you call it, and there I saw that Jew, Turk, infidel, and heretic were all alike condemned, because the truth is preached and they will not receive it. And there I saw still in my book that St. Paul speaks of ‘false brethren,’ but still brethren; of ‘weak brethren,’ but still brethren; of ‘unworthy brethren,’ but still brethren: he treats them all as having the gift of God within their reach, as responsible to judgment at the great day, whether they have kept the faith or ignored it—whether they have grasped the truth or let it slip; and then in the struggle for my own emancipation, my heart turned towards converting you. It was a bold assumption; but it grew in me stronger and stronger; so I joined prayer with effort, and began and ended my prayers with you, or, rather for you, asking for



truthfulness ; and my appeal was heard, for hope grew stronger as I prayed —

“ ‘ Hope was glad at the beginning, and fear was sad  
midway ;  
But sweet fruition cometh at the end.’ ”

“ And now my petitions are answered—all my desires fulfilled ; and I may again say, with the poet—

“ ‘ If it were now to die,  
’Twere to be most happy, for I deem  
My soul has her content so absolute  
That not another comfort like to this succeeds.’ ”

And Carsfield said—

“ And now hear me, Minnie,” his eyes dwelling in fondness on her happy, earnest face. “ Don’t talk of dying, Minnie, whilst I have only yet began to live. It was the Divine will that we should come together. I feel that our hearts are filled with the same love ; my soul is so knit with yours, that where you are, there must I be also. I have a fulness of strength to do and to further our Heavenly Father’s will, which I never had before.”



Carsfield paused, and looked into her sincere loving eyes, and he continued,

“I wish to make converts, Minnie, of those who are near and dear to me of my own; I must make them sharers with me in the knowledge and love, and the unsearchable riches of Christianity—the pillar and ground of truth. And you will help me, Minnie, to persuade others to seek the happiness that I have found. Let us, then, strengthen each other in all labour, rest on each other in all pain, and let us go forth and ply the task: to labour in season and out of season, to do our best with opportunity, leaving the rest with the God of benediction. ‘The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.’ And although we draw our breath at the large, magnificent, and august expression, still we must not be daunted.”

So it was with Carsfield. The truths he had gained were never lost sight of; he felt himself a monument of God’s mercy, and made so through



his Minnie's holy influence; and he was now restless to confer the same saving help on others—to give them the direction heavenwards, to clear the chaos of doubt and of bewildering and conflicting errors, in the same way that his had been cleared.

"I have only one desire more," he would say to Minnie, after a pause of deep reflection.

"And what is that?" she would ask.

"It is that every wife should be as good as my own dear Minnie; and every worthy man a sincere and faithful member of the Established Church; yet, sad to say, the earnest are as rare as white crows."

And to his desponding look Minnie replied—

"Still, one simple test of our rightfulness, our real, living faith, is in the soul—even with many relapses, many fallings back; there is the onward progress, the irresistible resolve to try again and again; it seems to my mind that this outweighs



all the dogmas that seek to define by dogmas. Do what we will, evil rages within us; and our prayers are but signals of distress—mere impulses, mere excitement of heart; if God is not our helper, there is little to be done.”

“But the church,” said Carsfield; “we must not rest content with talking about heavenly things, but as we feel we grow in grace, let us see to the rock on which we build—the Established Church.”

He paused a moment, and then continued—

“‘And God said let there be light, and there was light.’ After the force and the simplicity of this, can anything true be doubted?”

The seed sown silently and unseen, yet everywhere there come sweet flowers, without our foresight or our labour. We reap what we sow. Nature has love over and above all, and gives us shadow and blossom, and fruits that sprang from no planting of our own. And with this revealed



religion faithfully acted up to, this world becomes a Paradise.

And such became the little rustic village of Stoke. Mr. Carsfield repaired and renovated the old church with his best wealth, and heartfelt integrity; and the Primitive Unitarian Chapel, for want of followers, with no heart-burnings, no speaking evil, no dissensions, became a ruin; as the Church of Sardis, it was living, and is dead.

God permits error to triumph for a season, that He may display His own power, and the marvels of His grace at His appointed time.

Such is the triumph of the Gospel. With such feeling and such promise the chamber of death is no longer gloomy and forbidding—it is the bridal chamber of the Christian, decked with the flowers of hope, the lamp of faith, and if one member be honoured all the members rejoice with it.

We will close our book with the repetition of the sentence, rich in its simplicity—



“And the Lord said let there be light, and there was light.” Let there be light, and there is light.

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THE END.



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